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CREATING PAST-LIFE IDENTITY IN HYPNOTIC REGRESSION

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Abstract: To examine the role of hypnotic suggestion in identity in past-life regression, 2 experiments were conducted at the request of Korea's major national television companies. A real historical person and a fictional character were selected as past-life identities. After hypnotic induction, a past-life regression suggestion was given. While counting backward to past-life, the suggestion of a specific identity was interspersed 3 times. In 5 of 6 subjects, the same past-life identity that had been suggested was produced, with relatively rich content accompanied by emotional and historical facts identical to the suggested identity. This study found that it was quite simple and easy to manipulate past-life identity. The role of suggestion in the formation of past-life memories during hypnosis is crucial.

In South Korea, hypnotic past-life regression was imported from America in the mid-1980s. In the mid-1990s, some psychiatrists, psychologists, and lay hypnotists advertised in the mass media that past-life memories recovered during hypnosis are true memories. It became a controversial social issue, and many mass-media organizations published articles debating whether or not the claim was true. Currently, most lay hypnotists advertise past-life hypnosis, and some psychiatrists advertise the technique in the name of "transpersonal hypnotherapy," "past-life therapy," and "quantum hypnosis."

Although the professional hypnosis community has had little interest in the verification of past-life memories elicited during hypnosis, the general public has shown a curiosity about the facts. The first doctoral dissertation on hypnosis in a medical school in Korea was a study of the production of past-life memories in hypnosis by the author (Pyun, 1998a).

The following experiments were conducted and broadcasted nationally in response to requests from mass media. Past-life hypnosis

influences much of the general public's attitude toward hypnosis in general. A survey among Korean university students showed that 32% related hypnosis to past-life regression, and, when offered the chance to receive hypnosis, 35% wanted to explore the past, and 30% wanted to explore past-lives (Koh, 2007).

Past-life and reincarnation are sensitive issues religiously, especially among Christians. These phenomena probably influence Christian attitudes toward hypnosis in general. Among South Koreans, 25% are Buddhist, 15% Protestant Christians, 10% Roman Catholic, and 50% do not believe in religion, although they are influenced by Confucian tradition from the Yi Dynasty (1392–1910) (Korea National Statistical Office, 2006). It is therefore important for the scientific hypnosis community to explain these phenomena.

Regarding past-life memories in hypnosis, there have been few scientific studies (Baker, 1982; Pyun & Kim, 2009; Spanos, Menary, Gabora, Dubreuil, & Dewhirst, 1991), although the scientific hypnosis community's position is that memories of past lives are pseudo-memories or confabulations (Hammond et al., 1994; Shames & Bowers, 1992; Spanos, Burgess, & Burgess, 1994).

In 2008, one of the three major national Korean broadcasting systems, SBS-TV, approached the author about conducting experiments in past-life regression. In 2013, cable TV network Channel A made a similar request. These requests led to the following study.

METHOD

Experiment 1

The experiment was done in the author's clinic and broadcasted via SBS-TV's *Mystery Raider* episode on hypnosis on May 22, 2008.

Prior to the experiment, a past-life identity was preselected: Ryu Kwansoon, a famous young (18 years old), female fighter for independence under the rule of Japanese imperialism, in the 1919 March First Movement. During the episode, five members of Girls' Generation, a Korean pop singing group, agreed to appear as subjects. The five subjects were female, age 19 to 22 years. They were told that they were participating in a hypnosis experiment, but they were not told anything about past-life regression. Paintings depicting the March First Movement and a woman wearing a traditional Korean costume of the time of Japanese imperialism were placed in the waiting room. A large Korean national flag was displayed in front of a hypnosis chair in the author's room.

Sunny was the first subject. At the beginning of the session, she was told that she would receive a past-life regression. She was a past-life believer. Her eye-roll sign (ERS) score was 4 (Spiegel & Spiegel,

2004). Hypnotic induction was done with arm levitation. Her subjective comfort rating (SCR) was 7/10 (Pyun, 2013). Deepening with escalator technique resulted in 10/10 SCR. The past-life regression suggestion was given; it is a simple suggestion that, by counting from 20 to 0 the subject will reach a past life. In this experiment, during counting, the following suggestion was interspersed three times: "When you arrive in your past life, you will know that you were Ryu Kwansoon." When the counting was finished, Sunny cried and said she felt very cold in the dark. She is being tortured in jail by Japanese police. She poured out a painful cry, saying, "My country is not a Japanese colony! The Korean national flag is miserable!" Images were vivid. When asked about her name, she said she was Ryu Kwansoon. At the end of the session, a debriefing was done and she was instructed not to say anything about the experiment to the others in the waiting room.

Sooyoung was the second subject. She was a past-life nonbeliever and a Presbyterian. Her ERS score was 1. Hypnotic induction was done with arm levitation. SCR was 7/10 and the rapid progressive relaxation technique resulted in 10/10. Past-life regression was done using the same procedure. When the counting was finished, the subject described herself as wearing straw shoes, a white jacket, and a black skirt (a common costume in Ryu's time) and she said she went to school. She said that her mother called her "Ryu Kwansoon" because her name is Ryu Kwansoon. During the conversation, she suddenly opened her eyes without instructions. She wept tears and said she was sorry because she had not defended her country, and she remembered a memory in which she cried while holding a Korean national flag.

The camera crew and observing staff were astonished by the scenes. The response of Sunny and Sooyoung were so realistic that it could not be acting. There was no script whatsoever. After finishing with the two subjects, the director wanted to change the experimental plan because it had become clear that past-life identity can be manipulated.

The next past-life regressions were done without a suggested identity. Yuri, a past-life believer, said she was a daughter of the head of an American Indian tribe. Tiffany and Jessica were both born in the United States and were past-life nonbelievers and protestant Christians. They were reluctant to receive past-life suggestions.

When debriefing, those experienced hypnotic past-life identity understood that it was not real.

Experiment 2

Channel A suggested a similar experiment and wanted to know if they could replicate the SBS experiment. A program named *Solve with Logic* broadcast an episode about past-life on May 20, 2013. The experiment was done in the author's clinic.

Chunhyang was predetermined as a past-life identity. The story of Chunhyang is a popular folk tale in Korea, written in the Yi Dynasty era about 200 years ago. Chunhyang was a geisha who fell in love with a young man with a high social status. Despite the governor's repeated requests, she refused to give him bed service and remained faithful during her lover's absence. It is fiction; Chunhyang is not a real person but a fictional character. She is a symbol of chastity and beauty.

For this experiment, 4 female university students, not performers, age 20 to 24 years, participated as paid volunteers. All the subjects are past-life nonbelievers. Each had an ERS score of more than 3, suggesting the potential for high hypnotizability, and had no previous hypnosis experiences. As in the previous experiment, they were told that they were participating in a hypnosis experiment, but they were not told about the past-life regression. Paintings and books about Chunhyang were displayed in the waiting room.

At the beginning of the session, she was told that she would receive a past-life regression. After hypnotic induction, the past-life regression suggestion was given. During counting to the past, the following suggestion was interspersed three times: "When you arrive in your past-life, you will know that you were Chunhyang." At the end of the each session, a debriefing was done, and the subject was instructed not to say anything about the experiment to the others in the waiting room.

- First subject's response (ERS: 4; SCR: 6/10): "I see a horse-drawn carriage passing by. I think I'm back to the Yi Dynasty. I wear a Korean traditional costume with a white jacket, a red skirt, beoseon (traditional Korean socks) and rubber shoes. I'm in a tavern. A young nobleman on horseback passes by. I know him. He doesn't looks like a stranger. I feel ardent love. I believe I'm Chunhyang."
- Second subject's response (ERS: 3.5; SCR: 8/10): "I wear a traditional Korean costume with a green jacket, a red skirt and flower colored rubber shoes. I'm in a market. This is Yi Dynasty. They call me Chunhyang."
- Third subject's response (ERS: 3.5; SCR: 7.5/10): "I wear a traditional Korean costume with a yellow jacket and a red skirt. I live in a traditional Korean-style house." She shed tears. "My name is Chunhyang."
- Fourth subject's response (ERS: 3.5; SCR: 8/10): "I wear a traditional Korean costume with a yellow jacket, a red skirt and flower-colored rubber shoes. I'm sixteen. There are friends around. It looks like we are a rich family. My name is Maehwa."

When debriefing, all subjects that participated understood that the hypnotic past-life identity experienced was not real.

Discussion

These two experiments showed how nonverbal and verbal suggestions operate in a hypnotic context. It is quite possible that the related materials displayed in the waiting room played a significant role in the produced content. Simple verbal suggestions about the specific identity resulted in exactly the same identity with relatively rich content accompanied by emotional and historical facts identical to the suggested identity in 5 out of 6 subjects. In the other subject, a similar identity also appeared: Maehwa looks like the name of a geisha and she wore a similar costume and lived in a similar time as Chunhyang.

In a previous experiment (Pyun & Kim, 2009), the production rates of past-life memories in hypnosis were significantly correlated with the scores of the Korean version of the Harvard Group Scale of Hypnotic Susceptibility, Form A (HGSHS:K; Pyun, 1998b). In these experiments, the hypnotic susceptibility score was not measured with standardized tools, but a simple hypnotic susceptibility score (measured by ERS, responses to induction techniques, and SCR scores) was high for all subjects. It is my hypothesis that entertainers such as actors and singers usually have high hypnotizability. Without high hypnotizability, absorption and acting like someone else would probably not be possible. One can easily observe high ERS in actors and singers in TV and movies when they roll up their eyes. The first experimental group involved singers, while the second experimental group was would-be entertainers at universities.

In these experiments, past-life memories were produced regardless of previous past-life belief. All 5 nonbelievers produced past-life memories once they entered a high SCR hypnotic state. This result also replicates a previous experiment (Pyun & Kim, 2009).

Also in a previous experiment, easily imaginable or familiar countries and time periods tended to be produced. Ryu Kwansoon and Chunhyang are familiar characters to Koreans; one lived 90 years ago and the other is the character of a story from about 200 years ago. These time intervals look appropriate for rebirth.

Considering that suggestion is one of the main components of hypnosis (Bernheim, 1964; Kirsch, 1999; Spiegel, 2007), the hypnotic state is a natural phenomenon in everyday life (Erickson, 1985; Spiegel & Spiegel, 2004) and cognitions are influenced by the conscious and the unconscious (Bowers, 1984; Kihlstrom, 1999); phenomena similar to these experiments must occur in real-life situations without a formal induction of hypnosis. These experiments tell us much not only about the nature of past-life memories in hypnosis but also about the role of suggestion in hypnosis and everyday, real-life situations.

Conclusion

It was quite easy and simple to create a specific past-life identity as suggested in hypnotic past-life regressions. A real historic identity and a fictional identity could be created as suggested. The method was simple. After hypnotic induction, a past-life regression suggestion was given. It is a simple suggestion that by counting from 20 to 0 you will reach your past-life. During counting, the suggestion "When you arrive in your past-life, you will know that you were [A real historical person Ryu Kwansoon or a fictional character Chunhyang]" was interspersed three times.

Simple verbal suggestions about the specific identity resulted in exactly the same identity with relatively rich content accompanied by emotional and historical facts identical to the suggested identity in 5 of 6 subjects.

The production was related with high hypnotizability as measured by ERS and SCR but was not related with belief on past-life. These are same results with the author's previous experiment.

Suggestion is one of the main components of hypnosis, and the hypnotic state is a natural phenomenon of everyday life. It is quite possible that phenomena similar to these experiments occur in real-life situations without being formally named hypnosis. These experiments tell us much not only about the nature of past-life memories in hypnosis but also about the role of suggestion in hypnosis and in everyday, real-life situations.

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Die Erzeugung von vergangenen Identitäten in Rückführungen

Young Don Pyun

Abstrakt: Um die Rolle hypnotischer Suggestion bezüglich Identitäten in Rückführungen zu untersuchen, wurden auf Wunsch von Südkoreas größten nationalen Fernsehsendern zwei Experimente durchgeführt. Es wurden eine reale historische Persönlichkeit und eine erfundene Person als Identitäten vergangener Leben herangezogen. Nach der hypnotischen Induktion wurde eine Suggestion zur Regression in ein vergangenes Leben gegeben. Während der Rückführung zum vergangenen Leben wurde die Suggestion bezüglich einer spezifischen Identität drei Mal eingestreut. Bei 5 von 6 Teilnehmern wurde genau die Persönlichkeit des vergangenen Lebens hervorgerufen, die suggeriert worden war. Dabei war der Inhalt reichhaltig und wurde von emtionalen und historischen Fakten begleitet, die mit der suggerierten Persönlichkeit identisch waren. Diese Studie fand heraus, daß es relativ einfach war, Identitäten aus früheren Leben zu manipulieren. Die Rolle der Suggestion ist für die Entstehung von Erinnerungen bezüglich vergangener Leben entscheidend.

STEPHANIE REIGEL, MD

Création de l'identité d'une vie antérieure lors d'une régression hypnotique

Young Don Pyun

Résumé: Afin d'examiner le rôle de la suggestion hypnotique dans l'identité au cours d'une régression dans une vie antérieure, deux expériences ont été menées à la demande des principales sociétés de télévision nationales de la Corée. Un personnage historique réel et un personnage fictif ont été sélectionnés en tant qu'entités d'une vie antérieure. Après une induction hypnotique, les sujets ont reçu une suggestion de régression à une vie antérieure. Tout en comptant à rebours vers cette vie antérieure, l'hypnotiseur a entrecoupé à trois reprises sa suggestion d'une identité particulière. Cinq des six sujets ont produit l'identité antérieure suggérée, et ont fait état d'un contenu relativement riche accompagné d'émotions et de faits historiques identiques à ceux de l'identité suggérée. Cette étude montre qu'il est plutôt simple et facile de manipuler un sujet de façon à lui créer l'identité d'une vie antérieure. atteLe rôle de la suggestion dans la formation de souvenirs d'une vie antérieure est crucial durant l'hypnose.

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Creando una identidad de vida pasada en una regresión hipnótica

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Resumen: Para examinar el rol de la sugerencia hipnótica sobre la identidad en una regresión a una vida pasada, se condujeron 2 experimentos a solicitud de las compañías más grandes de televisión nacional de Korea. Se seleccionaron un personaje histórico real y uno ficticio como identidades de vidas pasadas. Después de una inducción hipnótica, se dio una sugerencia de regresión a una vida pasada. Mientras se contaba en sentido inverso hacia la vida pasada, se presentó, intercaladamente en tres ocasiones, una sugerencia para una identidad específica. En 5 de 6 sujetos, la identidad de vida pasada que había sido sugerida fue producida, con contenido relativamente detallado acompañado de hechos emocionales y factuales idénticos a la identidad sugerida. Este estudio encontró que resultó bastante sencillo y fácil manipular la identidad de la vida pasada. El rol de la sugerencia en la formación de memorias de vidas pasadas durante hipnosis es crucial.

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