Heterogeneity in high hypnotic suggestibility and its implications for the study of anomalous experiences

Results:

The goal of this project was to examine whether there are discrete subtypes of highly suggestible individuals and to explore the relevance of these subtypes for the occurrence and expression of anomalous perceptual experiences. We conducted a series of studies to test predictions derived from typological models that assert that highly suggestible individuals are comprised of dissociative and imagery/fantasy subtypes who experience hypnosis and hypnotic suggestions through different mechanisms. These subtypes are also expected to report differential patterns of anomalous perceptual experiences.

Our studies provide clear, but qualified, support for the typological models and illustrate the importance of dissociation and hypnotic suggestibility for our understanding of anomalous experiences. Three studies yielded complementary evidence for a dissociative highly suggestible subtype that experienced greater spontaneous alterations in awareness and poorer cognitive control during hypnosis, and greater involuntariness during hypnotic responding and a second subtype that exhibited milder alterations in consciousness and marginally superior cognitive control during hypnosis, and strong baseline imagery. Our fourth study found that the two subtypes differed from low suggestible individuals, but not one another, in self-reported state dissociation and functional connectivity, as measured by EEG, during hypnosis. In a final study, we found that the dissociative subtype reported a greater amount and diversity of anomalous perceptual experiences. The results cumulatively provide support for proposals that there are distinct subtypes of highly suggestible individuals but also point to the importance of similarities in this population.

Published work:

Presentations


**Peer-reviewed publications**


**Area(s) of interest:**

Hypnosis, dissociation, executive functioning, functional connectivity, anomalous experience
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