

## **BOOK REVIEW**

### **HEALING FROM WITHIN: THE USE OF HYPNOSIS IN WOMEN'S HEALTH**

**Edited by Lynne M Hornyack and Joseph P Green**

*American Psychological Association, Washington DC. 2000 Pp 282, £30.50*  
*ISBN 1-55798-647-9*

**Reviewed by Val Walters**

Hornyack and Green begin this book by challenging the traditional separation between psychological and medical treatments, but allude with optimism to research which is now more adequately addressing biopsychosocial perspectives in health care. By bringing together the scientific literature and the adjunctive use of hypnosis in clinical settings, the authors hope to contribute towards improved health care for women. They also highlight how women have been disadvantaged by health care policies as well as by dismissive attitudes from health care professionals. They categorize problems addressed in this book as those that are specific to women, such as obstetrics, gynaecology, the menopause and cancer (including breast and ovarian cancer), those which disproportionately affect women, such as eating disorders, body image concerns and anxiety disorders, and additional problems, such as infertility, smoking and cardiac disorders.

Chapter 2 (by Hornyack) addresses body image concerns in physical illness. Hornyack notes the dearth of references in the literature about the use of hypnosis to treat body image concerns, especially as hypnosis has been shown to facilitate alterations to body perception. She offers a seven-dimensional model of body image (comfort, competence, appearance, predictability, integrity, aliveness and identity) and describes an assessment procedure and treatment programme based on these dimensions. Interventions include hypnoprojective techniques, ego strengthening and grief work for mourning certain losses of appearance. A case study is presented of a 50-year-old woman suffering from osteoarthritis, depression and anxiety. I particularly liked the hypnotic suggestion that she should eject the tape of her critical mother's voice and replace it with a tape of useful self-affirmations.

The third chapter (by Schoenberger) focuses on women suffering from anxiety disorders. Statistics are quoted which suggest that anxiety is twice as likely to be experienced by women than men. Reference is made to research that disputes the argument that such statistics are due to women being more likely to seek help than men. Yet, Schoenberger points out that anxiety disorders are nevertheless underdiagnosed and likely to be treated for years simply at a physical, symptomatic level. The importance of actively involving clients in their therapy by teaching self-hypnosis is emphasized, as is the need to be aware that some people can become more anxious

with relaxation training, and the text recommends that in these circumstances alert inductions are used instead.

The use of hypnosis in the treatment of cardiac disorders is presented by Perdue in Chapter 4. She refers to a disturbing study (Myerberg, Cox, Interian, Mitrani, Girgis, Dylewski and Castellanos, 1998) which found that doctors attributed symptoms of cardiac disorders to panic, anxiety or stress in 54% of their patients. Of particular concern is a finding by Vazmsjian, Moscovitz, Man, Sarter, Zado, Brode, Schwartzman, Gottlieb and Marchlinski (1998) that 35% of women, as opposed to 4% of men, were initially given a psychiatric diagnosis when it was eventually discovered that they were suffering from paroxysmal supraventricular tachycardia. These findings are interesting in view of Schoenburger's point that, in the case of anxiety, it is the physical symptoms that are frequently addressed by doctors whilst psychological needs are often overlooked. Perdue draws attention to studies which have examined the usefulness of hypnosis in the treatment of cardiac disorders, including its use in open heart surgery (pre-operatively, intra-operatively and post-operatively); for invasive procedures, such as angioplasty, so that patients can tolerate balloon inflation; and for relaxation during the recovery stage following a heart attack.

Green (Chapter 5) writes on the benefits of the use of hypnosis for treating women who smoke and lists four aspects of smoking cessation which are pertinent to women. First, he points out that women put on more weight than men when giving up smoking and that women who use smoking as a form of weight control have particular difficulty with this; second, he refers to the link between menstrual problems and difficulties in giving up smoking; third, he discusses smoking during pregnancy and the risk to the unborn child; last, he puts smoking into context with an individual's attempts to manage depression. Green draws attention to the increased risks of dying from stroke in women who smoke and especially for women smokers using oral contraceptives. He also refers to the higher risk of osteoporosis, miscarriage, stillbirth and other pregnancy complications in women smokers. However, in presenting a case vignette, Green describes his client as '... a bright, attractive, and hard working young woman,' (p. 103). This phrase jarred as I read it. Commenting on a client's 'attractiveness' simply tells us about the therapist's aesthetic taste – and nothing about the client. I felt that these remarks colluded with the very societal pressures point out in this book which contribute to low self-esteem and negative body image.

The sixth chapter (by Weisberg) focuses on chronic pelvic pain (CPP) and hypnosis. The complexities of CPP are discussed and the symptoms described. Clearly, this is a difficult problem to treat and the failure to find an organic cause may lead to stigmatization. An example of treating a 39-year-old woman suffering from CPP is presented and I was intrigued about how the patient might have felt when sharing her intimate symptoms with her male therapist. I feel Weisberg missed an opportunity to discuss this point, especially in context with the use of hypnosis to treat such problems. Treatment follows a model in which '... the patient must learn to view physical symptoms as useful sources of state-encoded information rather than through an anxiety-based "organic versus psychogenic" lens' (p. 126).

Chapter 7 (by Hall and Lynn) addresses hypnotic treatment of women with breast or gynaecological cancer. The emotional impact of learning of the diagnosis is discussed and the reactions are likened to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The authors do an excellent job in describing this experience and suggest that, 'In many ways, the patient has entered an altered reality. Her world is no longer the

same.' (p. 141). Psychoimmunological considerations are outlined, particularly in reference to the effect of stress on cancer progression. The possible application of hypnosis includes utilizing imagery that can alleviate nausea and vomiting associated with chemotherapy, desensitization to medical procedures, age progression to facilitate solution-focused problem-solving and pain management. A case example is described of a 52-year-old woman suffering from ovarian cancer, and Hall and Lynn briefly address gender issues in the therapeutic relationship by stating, 'The significance of Vivian's self-exploration in therapy was that she was taking openly and intimately with a man, without fear of criticism, for the first time in her life.' (p. 152). Clearly, the message conveyed here is that a male therapist was an advantage for this woman. This is an important point for a discussion in a book such as this, yet the issue remains tantalizingly underexplored.

Chapter 8 (by Oster and Sauer) covers hypnotic methods for childbirth. These authors begin by introducing the reader to the value of hypnosis as an adjunct to medical procedures associated with childbirth, such as in the reduction of chemoanalgesia, reducing post-operative effects; reducing fear, tension and pain; increasing resistance to exhaustion and encouraging a sense of control. 'Oster's model' uses the metaphor 'parts of the mind', based on Hilgard's (1986) concept of 'multiple control systems of the mind' (p. 170). The model involves a coach (which, the authors prudently point out, may or may not be the husband). In describing this model, Oster writes, 'I [Oster] or, in subsequent sessions the husband, place the patient's hands on her stomach to offer her the opportunity to get to know her baby in imagery' (p. 174). I was left wondering why the client was not asked to place her hands on her stomach herself. Recently, the *American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis* published a special issue covering women's health in which 'empowerment' emerged as a strong theme (Linden, 2000). The subtleties and detail of therapy are as important in this respect as much broader issues, and I felt that the technique of lifting a woman's hands onto her stomach was not only intrusive (and unnecessary) but was an approach which was likely to do little to help a woman feel empowered.

Hypnotic interventions for infertility and pregnancy loss are the focus of Chapter 9 (by Mikesell). I felt this was a particularly sensitive chapter which successfully conveyed the tension between infertility being a problem shared by a couple but nevertheless requiring the woman to be subjected to most of the diagnostic and treatment procedures. Furthermore, these procedures may be followed by the despair of pregnancy loss. Mikesell gives an excellent account of the cycle of fantasizing that a pregnancy has been achieved, the pre-menstrual symptoms that signal failure and then shattered hope. I liked Mikesell's method of reframing strong negative emotions as energy. She gives a vivid example of a client imagining anger as an erupting volcano contained in a huge vessel with a vent which allowed for the steam to escape. The difficulty in mourning a pregnancy loss is also covered very sensitively. Mikesell includes a script for a mourning ritual, although I felt that this may not necessarily be appropriate for all women. She poses an interesting question regarding the hypnotizability of infertile women. Certainly, one may speculate about the possible high fantasy-proneness of this group.

Chapter 10 (by Halas) focuses on the menopause. She particularly emphasizes individual differences in how this might be experienced and makes reference to a review of the literature by Herrick, Douglas and Carlson (1996) which identified that clinicians may be guilty of pathologizing the menopause. Similarly, Halas cites other

reviews that have challenged the stereotypical 'menopausal woman' and acknowledges that women themselves may have 'internalized stereotypes' which can be changed with the adjunct of hypnosis in therapy. Halas uses hypnotic interventions to re-frame negative beliefs about the menopause and also to deal with menopausal symptoms, which she believes may be signalling 'unfinished business' (p. 224), including that of unresolved childhood sexual abuse.

Barabasz (Chapter 11) contributes a chapter on hypnosis and the treatment of eating disorders. She includes a section on hypnotizability and women with eating disorders. There is an excellent review of the hypnosis literature and clinical applications of hypnosis are described. I liked Barabasz's approach, in which I felt she was demonstrating tremendous respect for her clients both by sharing with them psychological theories of eating disorders (including a rationale for the benefits of using hypnosis for those suffering with bulimia) and by working with them to negotiate post-hypnotic suggestions. This chapter highlighted for me how the care taken in order to address issues relating to a client's need for control can lead to particularly sensitive treatment interventions. Yet, as with Green's chapter, I was dismayed to read the author's description of the client in her case example, 'J- was a very attractive, 22-year-old white college senior. She was well-groomed and appropriately dressed.' (p. 242).

By chance, the publication of this book coincided with another that focuses on gender (Clare, 2000), in which the author argues that cultural, social and psychological factors, rather than testosterone, are the likely causes of male aggression. In supporting this argument, Clare refers to studies which show that behaviour and cognition trigger hormonal responses rather than the other way round. For instance, he cites a study in which testosterone levels of athletes rise when they are anticipating competition. This brings theories of expectations to mind and the possible manipulation of hormonal levels by hypnotic suggestion.

Female hormones have an equally bad press. For instance, 'menopausal' and 'premenstrual' are frequently used as terms of insult. Just discussing hormones can cause a strong response, as was evident in the huge reaction from men offended by Clare's claims. Hormones are political, too, and research referred to in the present book highlights how the possible stereotyping of women has caused many to receive poorer health care than men. Although some chapters of this book, in particular the one by Barabasz, go some way towards challenging the pathologizing and stereotyping of women, I felt it could have gone a lot further. In particular, the book missed an opportunity to further explore health issues in the light of research such as that reviewed by Gruzelier (2000) which shows that suggestions, both non-hypnotic and hypnotic, can cause neurobiological changes. Individual differences in suggestibility could, for instance, be interesting avenues to explore in relation to understanding the wide range of experiences of the menopause which, as Barabasz points out, is actually difficult to define. This is, in itself, a paradox.

A book such as this could have explored to a far greater extent the special considerations of treatment for intimate female problems by male therapists who use hypnosis (both from the client's and the therapist's point of view). There is no doubt that male therapists can be very successful at helping women to resolve intimate problems and, furthermore, as Lynn and Hall imply, may have a particular role in helping women to resolve certain types of problems, including sexual abuse. But the male contributors to this book virtually ignored sensitive, gender-related issues regarding the therapeutic relationship specific to this type of work.

This is an important book since it is the first of its kind. There were some excellent contributions, in particular those of Hornyack, Mikesell and Barabasz. Yet, I felt that there were some disappointments too. However, the book fulfils its aim and gives considerable food for thought about the relationship between psychological, social and medical factors that underpin illness as well as determining a variety of responses to natural events and life stages. It describes a wide range of approaches and describes interventions that could be an excellent resource whether or not clinicians specialize in women's health. A particular strength is the excellent coverage of the literature by each contributor. A parallel book on men's health issues would, I feel, further contribute to the usefulness of this one.

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