

## **SELF-HYPNOSIS AND OSTEOPATHIC SOFT TISSUE MANIPULATION WITH A BALLET DANCER**

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### **Abstract**

This single case study of a ballet dancer incorporates essentially osteopathy, self-hypnosis and neurolinguistic programming (NLP) in the management of exhaustion, stress, anxiety and pain symptoms of the right thigh, calf and ankle combined with confidence strengthening techniques. Physical and mental burnout symptoms had reached the point of constant pain and overstrain of the muscles of the right leg and hip, spine and neck. In parallel with these were symptoms of exhaustion, unhappiness and a tendency to over-focus on other dancers at the expense of self-focus and motivation. The osteo/physical therapy entailed the rebalancing of overused, strained and hyper-tense muscular tissues using myofascial-release techniques, together with the deactivation of trigger points and postural integration. The mental attitude was supported through reframing techniques during self-hypnosis directed at general feelings of being blocked, imprisoned, cramped, exhausted and weakened in the right leg. Psychophysiological assessment post therapy was compatible with self-regulation training.

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**Key words:** NLP, osteopathy, performing arts, self-hypnosis, stress

### **Introduction**

Beginning in 1989, over the period of 14 years, the first author has evolved an original method incorporating soft-tissue osteopathy (Chaitow, 1988; Schleip, 2002), self-hypnosis (Erickson and Rossi, 1991) and NLP interventions (Grinder and Bandler, 1994) for the treatment of acute and chronic pain. This integrated multidisciplinary mind-body model uses soft-tissue osteopathy techniques called ‘PhysioTensegrity’ which have been specifically developed for orthopedic acute and chronic pain. The approach was originally inspired by a biophysical model first introduced by Buckminster Fuller in the 1960s (Fuller, 1975), and later verified by Ingber (1998). The cognitive aspects incorporate affirmation techniques (Coue, 1922), both with and without self-hypnosis, utilizing direct reversals of cognitive and somatic symptoms.

### **The patient**

A 24-year-old, male, demi-soloist of the Stuttgart Ballet, was self-referred on October 1, 2002 due to a therapy-resistant traumatized capsular tear of the right ankle, which had happened in May 2002. Although physiotherapy had been administered over a period of

five months, no great recovery was made and complex patterns of muscular compensatory imbalances had occurred along with considerable sensorimotor amnesia, which in turn had added great strain to his psycho-physiological state. Although outwardly he was still able to maintain his position as a growing talent in the company, he felt he was in a 'deteriorating and negative mind-body crisis'.

## **Therapeutic and training plan**

### *Session 1*

In an hour-long session, the patient's clinical history was taken. The physical symptoms included pain in the right ankle, right thigh, spine and neck, and cramping and weakness, while the psychological symptoms reported included feeling creatively blocked, caged in, out of centre, burned out and exhausted.

Ten minutes of trigger point release work (Chaitow, 1988) was applied to the Achilles tendon with the intention of demonstrating some relief from pain with a brief intervention. On a pain scale of 0–10, the immediate effect was a reduction of pain from 7 to 3.

### *Sessions 2–4*

Immediate physical intervention was required for three sessions involving further release of acute pain in the Achilles tendon using trigger/tender-point therapy, and application of myofascial release techniques on the calf and thigh as well as hip muscles (Chaitow, 1988; Barral, 1990; Paoletti, 2001). Myofascial release of the iliopsoas, with particular emphasis on the right side, provided immediate alleviation of the pelvic strain and easing of the iliosacral joint (Rohen, 1987). This was followed by release of over tension in the buttock muscles, quadriceps, and two muscles of great hypertension on the sides of the thigh called the tensor fascia latae. The right thigh was in a state of total overuse and tension, with many areas of sensitivity and adhesive shortening of muscle fibres. This technique resulted in great reduction of the physical pain and weakness in the right ankle and leg, as assessed on a 0–10 pain scale, from 8 to 3.

### *Session 5*

The symptoms of emotional distress were feeling 'imprisoned', 'weak' and 'heavy'. The patient then reframed/reversed with his own words through the affirmation 'I am free, strong and light'. He was then asked to find his own interpretation of this affirmation using 'authentic' movements (Wirhed, 1984), but not ballet movements, and allowing strong visual-emotional associations.

### *Session 6*

In this session and in the next period of treatments this statement of being 'free, strong and light' was transformed into the client's visual, kinesthetic and auditory awareness patterns, through personalized mental pictures. The method of reframing very quickly improved the client's performance and self-confidence.

### *Session 7*

The symptoms were then reframed and reversed with the statement 'I am free, strong and light' together with the associated body movements. Multimodal sensations were then experienced through instructions leading to a state of self-hypnosis. He reported a state of deep tranquility and peace, which he was taught to anchor by pressing his left earlobe

twice while in hypnosis. The aim of the latter was through conditioned association to reactivate this state of tranquility during high stress situations. He was then instructed to practise this exercise for 30 minutes each day

### *Sessions 8–18*

The specific aim was ‘Tensegrity re-balancing’ (Fuller, 1975) of the myofascial network. Fine-tuning of the deep postural muscles of the spine, pelvis and chest was carried out using the client’s ‘micromovements’ (Feldenkrais, 1985), whilst deep length frictions were used on the muscles.

Establishing greater bilateral synchronization of the control of the brain and body movements was induced, using specific coordination exercises. These exercises involve progressively complex tasks, with the aim of challenging and developing brain hemispheric synchronicity as well as reduction of anxiety (Petruzello and Landers, 1994). An example would be standing on the left leg while performing the figure of eight with the right leg and left arm, while simultaneously drawing a circle in the air with the right arm.

Sessions devoted to rebalancing muscles alternated with hypnosis sessions in order to extend and deepen the self-hypnosis experience. In order to deepen and strengthen the client’s personal belief in the effects of self-empowerment in hypnosis, a new approach to self-induction was introduced using catalepsy and analgesia of both arms and hands. Following the induction, counting backwards was initiated, from 10 to 1, and while breathing out, simultaneous anchoring of deeper states of relaxation/peace and tranquillity was manifested. The left arm was made cataleptic through touch and suggestion, the right arm becoming analgesic and stiff.

## **Discussion**

The 18 hours of intense osteopathy and self-hypnosis training took place over five months: ten sessions were applied in October, four sessions between November and December and four in January/February 2003.

Continued improvement in the client’s subjective and objective self-confidence was observed until the treatments ended on 24 February 2003. The main features of improvement as reported by the dancer were as follows:

- no pain or exhaustion left in the right leg and foot, or general feelings of exhaustion even under extreme physical strain;
- a new sense of freedom using his own authentic form of interpretation within the structure of ballet;
- a new found focus;
- a new sense of his centre of energy;
- far greater self-confidence.

Since then the dancer has not only been capable of extremely high performance levels but has improved in criteria that are necessary in his profession. This improvement has not only been noticed by closely involved colleagues and ballet masters but also by the public and ballet critics. The following are professionally translated excerpts from the *Stuttgarter Zeitung* 5 March 2003, written by ballet critic, Jürgen Holwein, just a fortnight after treatment had finished:

What a pleasure it is to see JN dance; and what a pleasure it is to listen to him speaking. And, you know, we need to ask ourselves why this is. There is a certain sound about the man, a certain resonance. The dark side of the moon seems to reverberate within him, and the volcanic element of the earth seems to resonate within his entire being. Put in simpler terms, one might say that this is a man who is completely at ease with himself, a person who emanates all that is authentic yet in a most moving way. One has the feeling that when JN interfaces with people, for him to do so is the most perfect expression of freedom.

And in the process of all this, he has acquired a greater familiarity with and understanding of his body, of 'where the limits are. You learn to trust yourself and to have confidence in yourself. You think: I can see where the limits are; and yet you can go on much, much further than you think.'

Certain memories come flooding back: in black tights and with a bare torso, I see the young man dancing all alone yet totally unaware of himself, creating himself from his own very essence, where melancholy and sinew meet and unite. The audience experienced the birth of the dancer JN as a young man in a solo specially written for him by Alejandro Cerrudo Martinez, 'Recuerdos' (2001), to the accompaniment of sounds of passion and longing produced by Catalanian guitarist Francisco Tárrega.

'I knew this was a piece that would allow me to show what I'm really all about: now you're seeing me for the first time!' It was suggestive, grand, erotic. The dancer had discovered something which belonged to him and him alone: 'his centre of energy'.

A psychophysiological assessment recorded post-training during April and June disclosed an abundance of alpha in the eyes open electroencephalograph (EEG). With an EEG biofeedback training involving a protocol that inhibits alpha and enhances the slower brain rhythm theta, and which typically does not show a theta /alpha crossover until after several sessions, crossover was readily achieved (Egner and Gruzelier, 2003). Similarly heart rate coherence training aimed at achieving a balance between sympathetic and parasympathetic influences disclosed from the first session of training a balanced state both at baseline and in the presence of imagined stressors (McCraty, Atkinson, Tiller, Rein and Watkins 1995).

A one-act ballet was subsequently created for the dancer together with a principal ballerina, and this was premiered in June.

Further reports of this approach for alleviating acute and chronic pain through the combination of cognitive and somatic techniques including hypnosis are in preparation, and formal research studies are being planned.

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## **Appendix 1. Guidelines for the development of self-determination and self-empowerment**

### *Guideline One: the process of change*

1. Acknowledgment of the wish to change.
2. I am willing to change.
3. I make the effort to change.
  - Definition of the symptom, negative aspect, state or attitude.
  - Choose not more than five symptoms that are negative to you.
  - Boost them, over-exaggerate them, fire them up or heat them, move or act them out (Mindell, 1998).
  - Look at the picture of the ‘heated’ negative consequence.
  - Ritualize the acceptance that these symptoms until now belong to you alone. You cannot deeply change that which does not belong to you.
  - Confirm that you are ready to change and transform and let go of the negative. The ‘self-commitment process’.

### *Guideline Two: reframing and goal setting*

- Find your personal Affirmation Goal (Tracey, 1993).
- Transform the raw negative words to the positive opposites.
- Find the positive meanings of the words relative to your life’s situation.
- Transfer them all into the personal context, e.g. I am ... or, I grow...
- Find the present tense of all the words.
- Keep the structure of the words and sentence simple.
- Develop the affirmation in a rhythmical and musical manner.
- Be clear that the affirmation gives you your clear goal.

### *Guideline Three: anchoring process*

1. The ‘anchoring’ of the affirmation in the five senses, using associations.
2. One affirmation example: I grow in strength, joy, and inspiration.
  - How does joy associate to my sense of taste?
  - How does joy smell?
  - What does joy sound like?
  - What does joy look like?
  - What does joy feel like?
  - Finally what does joy move like?
  - For each word develop one authentic movement.
  - String all authentic movements together for a short, simple choreography.

*Guideline Four: building intensity*

1. The visualization of the affirmation.
2. Deepen states of relaxation.
  - Frequency: how often do I visualize?
  - Vividness: how clearly do I see the vision?
  - Intensity: how well is the picture charged with emotion?
  - Duration: how long do I hold the picture?
  - State of consciousness: what level of consciousness can I access and maintain?
  - Use gentle slow music CD as background support for induction and for deepening relaxation.

*Guideline Five: the individual action plan*

1. The verbalization.
2. Your goal in action.
3. Living your goal.
  - Speak the affirmation whilst in the rhythm of walking.
  - Speak the affirmation whilst doing bilateral hemispheric synchronization exercises.
  - Speak the affirmation whilst doing authentic movements.
  - Speak the affirmation just before going to sleep and on waking up.
  - Use the affirmation whilst in meditation.
  - Put the affirmation into a personal, simply composed song.

*Process management:*

Using the new found positive mental attitude commit yourself to 21 days of intensive training. The ingredients are:

1. Patience.
2. Persistence.
3. Warmth.
  - Whilst practising, develop feelings of warmth and love towards your heart area. Smile to yourself.
  - Keep all negative thoughts and feelings and actions to the absolute minimum.
  - Look for people whom you like and love and are good for your new found aim and who will support and help your growth.
  - Keep away from distressing and negative people in the first 21 days.
  - Read and learn as much as possible relating to self-empowerment and personal growth in this phase.

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