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## EFFECTS OF A SHORT TERM MINDFULNESS INTERVENTION ON HYPNOTISABILITY AND MENTAL HEALTH

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**Grant 163/18**

**Background:** Cold control theory claims that people can alter their subjective experiences in responding to hypnotic suggestions, by having an intention to perform the cognitive or behavioural act required (e.g. lift an arm for an arm levitation suggestion), while being unaware of the intention to perform that action (in fact thinking “I do not intend to lift my arm”). That is, according to the theory, hypnotic response entails not being mindful of a relevant intention.

**Aims:** The aim was to test the hypothesis that hypnotic response may be harder for people who have been trained to be more mindful of mental states, compared to an active control.

**Method:** Participants were randomly assigned to one of three groups: mindfulness of mental states intervention; mindfulness of the world intervention (active control); no intervention (“waiting list” control). The mental states condition involved daily exercises in being aware of one’s mental states over two weeks. The world condition was similar in all respects except participants practiced being mindful of the world. Hypnotic response was measured before and afterwards; as was mindfulness, stress, and depression and anxiety for comparison with other mindfulness interventions.

**Results:** Consistent with the hypothesis that the mental state intervention increases mindfulness of intentions, the mental state group increased in the mindfulness facet Acting with Awareness compared to the waiting list control, difference = 0.35 Likert units. A correlational study we ran showed a change of -0.13 subjective units in hypnotic response per unit change acting with awareness. Thus, we would expect a change in hypnotic response of  $0.35 \times -0.13 = -0.05$  subjective units in the mental state group compared to the control group. The amount by which hypnotic response reduced in the mental states condition vs the control condition was -0.18 (SE = 0.18),  $t(60) = 1.00$ ,  $B_{H(0,.05)} = 0.79$ , which is insensitive (that is, no conclusion follows). Based on the error variance in these data we can estimate we would need about 3,000 participants in total to detect such an effect. Mindfulness of mental states compared to controls reliably reduced depression and anxiety by 0.2 Likert units.

**Conclusions:** Showing an increase in mindfulness reduces hypnotic response will need a multilabs study. We found however that mindfulness of mental states rather than the world reduces depression and anxiety.

**Keywords:** Mindfulness, Hypnosis, Depression

### **Publications:**

Dienes, Z., Lush, L., Palfi, B., Rooseboom, W., Scott, R., Parris, B., Seth, A., & Lovell, M. (2020). Phenomenological control as cold control. Submitted to *Psychology of Consciousness*; minor revisions have been requested. (Available on PsyArXiv <https://psyarxiv.com/7jn8q>)

Lush, P., Botan, V., Scott, R. B., Seth, A. K., Ward, J., & Dienes, Z. (2019). Phenomenological control: response to imaginative suggestion predicts measures of mirror touch synaesthesia, vicarious pain and the rubber hand illusion. <https://psyarxiv.com/82jav/> (To be re-submitted)

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