

BOOK REVIEW

Perceptual Hypnosis: A Spiritual Journey Toward Expanding Awareness by Fredrick Woodard. Red Feather, 2017. 176 pp. ISBN: 13-978-0764353109.

Division 30 of the American Psychological Association (APA) defines hypnosis as: “A state of consciousness involving focused attention and reduced peripheral awareness characterized by an enhanced capacity for response to suggestion.” Yapko (2012) writes that “the field of hypnosis has been influenced by the need for empirically validated treatments” (p. 10).

Hypnosis has been associated with improved perceived stress (Fisch et al. 2017), and the lowering of pain, nausea, and fatigue (Montgomery et al. 2007). In a meta-analysis, hypnosis has been established as adjunctive treatment to medical and psychological interventions, increasing treatment efficacy (Mendoza & Capafons 2009). Empirically supported hypnosis scripts have been organized in a hypnosis medical manual for practicing hypnotherapists (Elkins 2017). Cutting-edge research, evaluating physiological changes in the brain, during hypnosis, led by senior Stanford researcher, Dr. David Spiegel (Jiang et al. 2016), used fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging) during hypnosis, and found changes in neural activity. Part of the conclusion summary reads: “These changes in neural activity underlie the focused attention, enhanced somatic and emotional control, and lack of self-consciousness that characterizes hypnosis.”

Grounded in phenomenological–perceptual theory, and building on Jung’s (1971) and Erickson’s (1980) work, among others, Dr. Woodard writes about the effects of hypnosis in the conscious and in the unconscious mind. *Perceptual Hypnosis: A Spiritual Journey Toward Expanding Awareness* includes an introduction, eleven chapters, and a conclusion, which provide a method and tools for self-help. At the end of each chapter, a summary of the main perceptual points and exercises to guide self-inquiry assist the reader in applying and deepening the learned content. The accompanying CD provides self-help recorded instruction for self-exploration.

Dr. Woodard outlines the foundational experiential and theoretical elements that led to the writing of his book, including his own various hypnotic experiences, and he theoretically proposes that hypnosis consists of differentiation, where certain aspects of the perceived Universe are magnified, while others settle in the background. He hypothesizes that

hypnosis works within three levels of awareness, including a higher self, a conscious mind, and a subconscious mind, stating that “perceptual hypnosis is a spiritual phenomenon” (p. 52).

Dr. Woodard describes the Christian experience of stigmata, or spontaneous bleeding in the body, corresponding to Jesus Christ’s wounds at crucifixion. He suggests that the physical manifestation of stigmata is a consequence of similar mechanisms found in hypnosis, where psychological factors cause physiological changes. He goes on to provide an overview of paranormal phenomena. Finally, he proposes five principles of perceptual hypnosis as guidelines for successful practice.

Dr. Woodard’s passion about the subject of hypnosis comes through his writing. A major issue with his book, however, is that although hypnosis has been established as an evidence-based intervention, Dr. Woodard’s writing does not reflect the current empirical literature. He tends to focus on his own experience and interpretations of complex human phenomena.

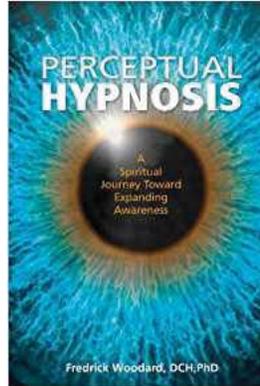
Dr. Woodard provides a useful introduction to hypnosis for beginners, for example by explaining the concepts of differentiation, expanded awareness, and perceptual changes in phenomenological–perceptual theory. However, these concepts are difficult to define and to measure; they are in need of empirical validation.

Similarly, the term “spiritual” lacks definition, and it is broadly used. Questions about the nature and characteristics of spirituality remain unanswered. Empirical studies are needed to begin to answer some of these questions. In addition, when discussing hypnosis, religion, and spirituality, Dr. Woodard tends to focus on the Christian experience, instead of including discussion about other religions as well. Chapter Nine’s title, which includes the words religion and spirituality, suggests that several religions would be discussed, however that is not the case. Dr. Woodard writes primarily about Christianity.

An example of a comprehensive overview of hypnotic practices in world religions is provided by Brugnoli (2014). She summarizes the beliefs and practices of mindfulness and meditation, in Buddhism, Zen Buddhism, Christian Meditation, Hinduism, Islam Meditation, Jainism, Judaism, Native Americans, and Taoism, in the context of providing hypnosis in palliative care.

An explanation of how perceptual hypnosis relates to contemporary hypnosis research would have made Dr. Woodard’s writing stronger from an academic perspective. A discussion about potential similarities or key differences between perceptual hypnosis and the empirical work from leading researchers, for example Gary Elkins, Guy Montgomery, or David Spiegel, would have enriched Dr. Woodard’s book.

In addition, an analysis about Dr. Woodard's perceptual hypnosis theory, compared with key historical perspectives on hypnosis would have provided context in Dr. Woodard's work. A discussion about how perceptual hypnosis was influenced, or not influenced, for example by Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis (Bachner-Melman & Lichtenbert 2001), recognized as a precursor to contemporary hypnosis, or Pierre Janet's early hypnosis and dissociation work (Haule 1986), would have provided further insight into the theory of perceptual hypnosis. Dr. Woodard does state that differentiation is not dissociation (pp. 19, 20), however further inquiry into specific differences between the two terms, linking the discussion to well-known authors' works, would have explained further perceptual hypnosis theoretically.



Finally, even though Coe (2014) suggests the need for studies about readers' expectations to improve indexing practices, there is general agreement in the academic community that indexing reflects scholarly work, and it provides benefits to the end-users, such as easier access to specific themes, concepts, and information. Dr. Woodard's book would have benefitted from an index.

In conclusion, *Perceptual Hypnosis: A Spiritual Journey Toward Expanding Awareness* might be an appropriate introductory book for hypnosis beginners because it provides basic knowledge about the practice of hypnosis, useful summaries of perceptual points, a written hypnosis script, and a hypnosis CD recording. However, from an empirical standpoint, it lacks rigor and grounding in science. It does not add knowledge to the current scientific discussions in the field of hypnosis, such as the efficacy of hypnosis in treating various psychological and medical conditions, and the physiological effects of hypnosis in the brain. Also, empirical validation of how perceptual hypnosis is a spiritual phenomenon is needed, and indexing would have improved the book from an academic standpoint.

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