**Theories of Hypnosis**

For over a century scientists and clinicians have proposed mechanisms to explain the phenomenon associated with hypnosis. The key theories of hypnosis, historical and current, are presented here. For the more recent models some knowledge of cognitive psychology is useful. Within psychology most current models of how the mind works what is termed 'executive function' make use of the concept of an executive control system  [(Norman & Shallice, 1980, 1986)](http://hypnosis.tools/hypnosis-research-papers.html#Norman1980) (a description of what is meant by executive control is given on this page).

A key debate in hypnosis throughout the twentieth century has been between 'state' vs. 'non-state' theories, properties of these types of theories are given below. Recently attempts have been made to integrate findings from both of these positions.

**State: Hypnosis is a divided start of consciousness. (Neodissociated Theory)**

* Altered state of consciousness
* Altered state of brain function
* Response are a result of dissociation

Hilgard's Neodissociation theory of hypnosis is a classic 'state' theory. It proposes that hypnotic phenomenon are produced through a dissociation within high level control systems. Essentially, the hypnotic induction is said to split the functioning of the executive control system (ECS) into different streams. Part of the ECS functions normally, but is unable to represent itself in conscious awareness due to the presence of an 'amnesic barrier'. Hypnotic suggestions act on the dissociated part of the ECS and the subject is aware of the results of the suggestions, but is not aware of the process by which they came about.

Hilgard's theory was inspired by his experiments with the 'hidden observer' phenomenon whereby a 'hidden part' of the mind of a subject experiencing hypnotic pain relief could be encouraged to elicit reports of the 'true' pain experience. The idea that the hidden observer demonstrates the presence of conscious and unconscious executive systems in hypnosis is a controversial notion

**Proof:**
Brain can engage in other unconscious processing
Part of the brain can operate as an interpreter or reporter of events (hidden observer)

**Non-state: Hypnosis is a social phenomenon.**

Primarily a response to social factors, role playing, sociocognition or other environmental factors created by the hypnotist.
Social-cognitive theories form the 'non-state' end of the 'state-nonstate debate'. State theories argue that processes such as 'repression' or 'dissociation' operate when subjects are given a suggestion, whereas non-state theories view subjects as active "doers" and observe the suggested effect as an enactment rather than a happening (Spanos et al, 1980).

Spanos’ Socio-Cognitive Theory - attitudes, beliefs, imaginings, attributions and expectancies all shaped hypnotic phenomena.

Kirsch's Response Expectancy Theory - expectancies can directly alter our subjective experience of internal states. In addition, when we expect a particular outcome we sometimes unwittingly behave so as to produce that outcome

**Proof:**

* Difficulty finding behavioral physiological or neural markers for hypnosis
* Hypnotic phenomenon can be duplicated using placebos or imagination
* Hypnotic phenomenon can be explained by obedience to the hypnotist or conformity with the other participants
* Fantasy prone individuals are more prone to social influence
* People who are rendered blind or deaf under hypnosis can still see or hear even though their actions or beliefs suggest they cannot.
* Your motivation to be hypnotist and your trust of the hypnotist influences the effects