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# 2025 Festival of Psychology

16–18 May 2025

**Re-discovering Hypnosis Again for the First  
Time: The Utilization of Attentional Processes in  
Short-Term Psychotherapies**

**Michael D. Yapko, Ph.D.**



# The Agenda for My Presentation:

**Part 1:** Foundations of clinical hypnosis

**Part 2:** Watching it Work: The Case of Mike

Summary

Q&A if time permits



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The primary goal of this short presentation is to help you discover – or perhaps ***re-discover*** - the rich and complex world of clinical hypnosis, a context for maximizing client engagement and therapeutic responsiveness.

My fascination began as an undergraduate student when I was only 19... and it has only grown over time



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- If this woman hadn't volunteered to be a demonstration subject, how would she ever have known she had the **capacity to alter her perceptions** of pain?
- People in hypnosis process information differently and can access abilities they otherwise don't know how to access.
- Thus, you have to ask yourself what you believe about people and their innate abilities.
- Do you believe people have more resources than they consciously realize? If so, how can they effectively access them? Clinical hypnosis makes this possible in ways not readily available otherwise.



- If people have resources, then why don't they use them?  
*Because the resources are dissociated* – there is no link, or trigger, to associate to them in some desired context. Hypnosis is a vehicle for establishing strong associations, links to therapeutic resources.
- Modern clinical hypnosis employs **attentional focusing strategies to elicit healing resources** the patient may not even know he or she has, empowering him or her in the process.



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# The Key Questions Any Curious Clinician Might Consider:

- How does paying attention – focusing – translate into non-volitional (i.e., automatic) yet meaningful responses?
- Why do some people respond so dramatically to experiential processes finding them “transformative,” while others respond only minimally?
- What general factors determine one’s capacity to respond?
- What role do specific socio-cognitive factors such as trust and expectancy play in client responsiveness?
- Can responsiveness be increased?





# Some of the Many Key Domains of Hypnotic Inquiry

- Neuroscience, neural mechanisms, and morphological differences across individuals
- Hypnotic responsiveness (hypnotizability) as a general phenomenon
- Differences in hypnotizability across individuals and groups, including the social and cognitive factors that underlie responsiveness
- The relationship between attentional processes, capacity for dissociation, and perceptual malleability
- “Attentional blindness” as in “The Invisible Gorilla” experiments



Many approaches to therapy emphasize the merits of rationality; hypnosis emphasizes the merits of *non*-rationality

**Hypnosis emphasizes *experiential learning* over cognitive instruction; hypnotic responses aren't necessarily logical and can't be demanded or forced. Rather, they're subjectively experienced in the context of a collaborative, purposeful relationship**



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**So often, the foundation of people's problems is found in their focusing on aspects of experience that work against them:**

They focus:

- on what's wrong instead of what's right,
- on the past hurts instead of the future possibilities,
- on irrelevant details and miss the bigger picture (or vice versa),
- on their feelings when they should be thinking (or vice versa),
- on the present moment when they should be thinking ahead or learning from the past

Hypnosis is about ***securing and guiding focus*** in ways that enhance experience



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During Hypnosis, People Can Experience Marked Shifts in:

**Physiology** (breathing slows, muscles relax, etc.)

**Sensory perception** (temp, weight, distance, etc.)

**Cognition** (thoughts clearer, slower, detached, etc.)

**Affect** (happier, sadder, curious, etc.)

**Behavior** (self-help, new behavior, proactive, etc.)

**Temporal orientation** (past, present, future focus)

**Self-definition** (more resourceful, competent, etc.)



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## Two Widely Reported Studies That Highlight a Key Point About Hypnosis:

- The Eye Pupil Adjusts to Imaginary Light: A Study from University of Oslo (Laeng & Sulutvedt, *Psychological Science*)
- Suggesting Seeing in Color vs. Black and White (Kosslyn et al., *Am J of Psychiatry*)

Key Point: People responded to the **suggested** reality, **not** the objective reality



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## Key Lesson #1:

*What You Focus on, You Amplify in Your Awareness*

The salient clinical questions are, “What do we want the client to focus on, and why?”

## Key Lesson #2:

*The power is NOT in the suggestion itself.*

Rather, the power is in the client’s ability to **actualize** the suggestion. Thus, a meaningful or therapeutic response involves the **interactional** product of *many* factors, not just how salient the suggestion might be or how well it’s delivered.



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# Watching it Work: The Case of Mike...

## Hypnosis in Treating Depression and Co-Morbid PTSD



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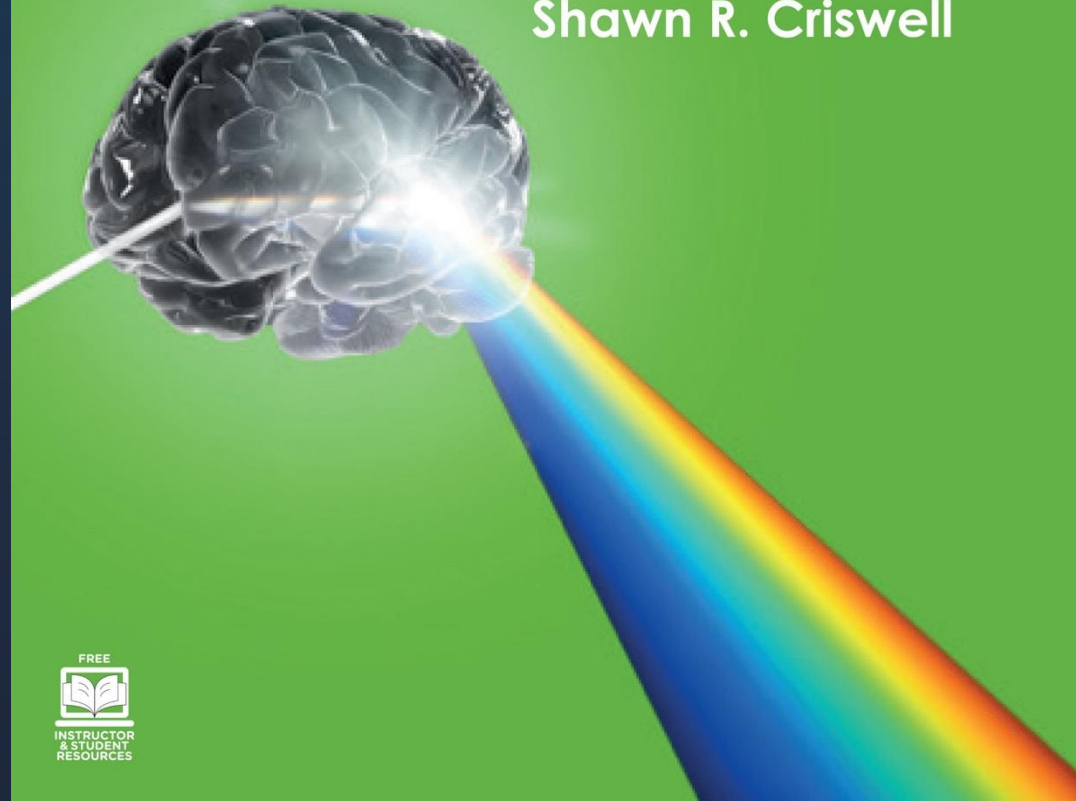
SIXTH EDITION



# TRANCEWORK

An Introduction to the Practice of Clinical Hypnosis

Michael D. Yapko and  
Shawn R. Criswell



# Clear Indications for Using Hypnosis in Early Phase Treatment

- **Acuteness of symptoms**
- **Severity of symptoms**
- **Stable attributional style re: symptoms**
- **Rigidity; invariant nature of symptoms**
- **Situationally specific symptoms**



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# Why Learn Hypnosis?

- Empirical evidence ***it helps people***, i.e., objectively enhances treatment outcomes
- **All** therapy involves the use of suggestion; forming suggestions well is a skill
- Provides insights into qualities and mechanisms of subjective experience
- Highlights the malleability of subjective experience
- Enhances and re-defines one's sense of personal control and resourcefulness (“agency” and “empowerment”)
- Multi-dimensional applications (physical, cognitive, affective, spiritual, etc.)
- Enhances cognitive, behavioral and emotional **flexibility**
- Encourages thinking in terms of meaningful and realistic *possibilities*



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# claria™



- A mobile app that clients can listen to when they're not in session with you
- A Strength Based Approach to Skill Building with 13 Hypnosis Sessions

## Health Care Professionals (HCPs) Get FREE ACCESS

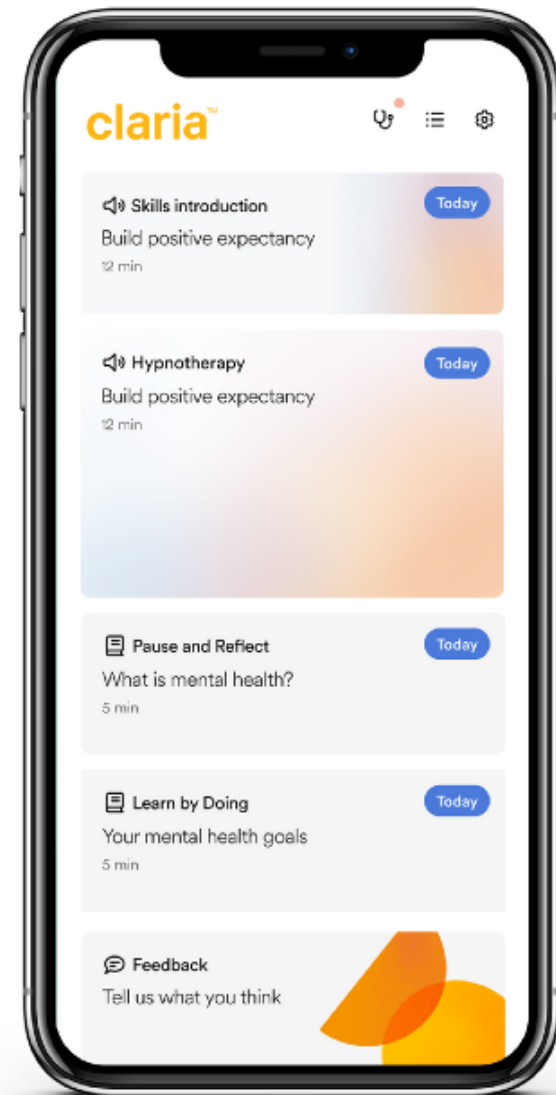
**STEP 1:** Sign up on Mindset Health



[join.clariamentalhealth.com/clinicians](https://join.clariamentalhealth.com/clinicians)

**STEP 2:** AFTER you've sign up, THEN download the app from the App Store or Google Play

**STEP 3:** If you think this will help your clients, refer them to the App Store or Google Play directly





THANKS SO MUCH FOR COMING THIS AFTERNOON!

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