

# **Suggestibility Testing & Objectivity**

**Why They Both Suck**

**By Scott Sandland**

Many hypnotists take for granted the belief that not everyone is a good candidate for hypnosis. Some of us even spout statistics regarding which percentage of people fall into which category of suggestibility, as made famous by a study at Stanford University. The funny thing is though the study was as objective as possible, which is the intrinsic flaw in any clinical study about hypnosis. More on that in a minute.

A woman came into the dentist office, where I am on staff, last Friday. She promptly told me that she was there against her will and that she had tried to tell the dentist that she knew she couldn't be hypnotized (I get this a lot for some reason). So I asked her the question I always ask people who tell me that, "how do you know you can't be hypnotized." Funny thing though, she gave me the best answer I have ever heard.

You see this woman, let's call her Mary, went to Stanford many years ago. And she took place in this study they were doing on hypnosis and sleep. Long story short, scientists at Stanford spent quite a bit of time and money proving that Mary couldn't be hypnotized. They even did follow ups with her, one two years ago, and she was sure she wasn't a good hypnotic subject. But the more Mary and I talked, the more I recognized within her qualities of a great candidate for hypnosis. So I told her about what I see as the intrinsic flaw in the study she was a part of and convinced her to stay for the remainder of her hour.

I told Mary that clinical studies are supposed to be objective, and that makes sense. So in the case of the Stanford study they used the same technique on a large sample of people, asked a handful of questions about the experience, and compiled the data. The problem is in their intent, which was to find out if that specific technique worked or not. When I am working with a client it's my intent to get results, and therefore to use the technique I deem as best suited for that person at that time. So they look for what percentage of the population fits a certain technique, where as I am as dynamic as I can be to (hopefully) find the technique that best fits the client.

The difference between the approaches and outcomes is huge, as I'm sure many other hypnotists have recognized long ago. But I think this is a story worth sharing, because any time we can show a flaw in conventional wisdom I think it's important to do so. Because Mary was surprised, not only with the fact that she was hypnotized, but by how deeply she was hypnotized. I had her fully regressed to moments that made her cry with joy, then deepened her further until she went lights out and didn't remember anything for a period of time she couldn't define (just under ten minutes of deep conditioning) and then came back up feeling better than she had in a long time. She was excited about coming back for her next appointment and thanked me for hypnotizing her.

And for what it's worth, there is zero ego behind me telling this story. My point is in emphasizing what we can do with people who are willing to follow instructions, even the most understandably skeptical of our clients. I think a lot of good hypnotists fall into believing that there are some people who just aren't candidates for the work we do, and I think that's unfortunate. I understand that there are some people that I am not best suited to work with, and I think there are some people who aren't ready to deal with an issue at a given time, but I believe just as strongly that everyone can be hypnotized given the right timing and practitioner.

And I would really like to express to the newbies how important this thinking is, and what it does for me as a practitioner. It necessarily short circuits any doubt on my part and gives me the freedom to be at ease with my clients. It means that if I learn enough techniques and approaches I can be even more confident in the fact that I can hypnotize anyone who walks in my door. And this is exactly why we keep learning, regardless of the numbers of years of experience we have.

This is also a great example of why I don't use scripts with clients. I like scripts, read scripts, even write scripts, but the only piece of paper in my office is my notes that I take during the session. Getting stuck in the rut of "script-nosis" simply doesn't interest me, because that just makes me a walking tape recorder. And if I was a tape recorder then I wouldn't be able to hypnotize Mary.

So it's a fun little story, mostly because it encapsulates something we already know and explains it so simply. Mary is the perfect example of what we can do with our clients when we ignore conventional wisdom and trust our instincts. Hypnosis is, at its best, a really fun blend of art and science. Some professions, even in the medical and mental health fields, should remain objective. But the very nature of our craft is subjectivity, to elicit and create personal scenarios in our clients' best interest. And I think this is worth saying every now and again, and I recognized this as a good opportunity to do so.

Have fun,  
Scott Sandland

You can see more of Scott's work on his website at [www.GOHypnotherapy.com](http://www.GOHypnotherapy.com) or email him at [Scott@GOHypnotherapy.com](mailto:Scott@GOHypnotherapy.com)