

Is hypnosis a useful tool that can produce valuable data for police and investigative agencies? The answer to this question depends on the selection of people who most likely have the sought after information locked in the memory structures of their brain.

One of the unresolved debates about memory is whether memory is selective, or whether it is a total recording of all experienced events. This becomes an important issue when considering the use of memory enhancing techniques such as hypnosis.

As a consultant to the police agencies in British Columbia, Canada, I am asked to use my experience as a hypnotist to assist people who may or may not possess within the depths of their memory banks, information that would assist the investigating officer in their crime solving activities. Sometimes useful information ensues, but more often no useful information is revealed.

The main reason for the failure to find the sought after information is that it just wasn't experienced by the subject, so it can't be found. An example will help. You are driving through a township on your way to your favorite vacation spot. You pass a bank and there is a black SUV parked outside. Just a few seconds after you pass the bank two masked men rush out of the bank carrying large bags, and drive off at great speed in the SUV. The investigating officers are seeking anyone who was in the vicinity of the bank at the time of the robbery who may have noted the registration of the SUV. The word would go out to the public asking anyone who had been in the area at a specific time to come forward to assist in the investigation. You recall being in the area at around the specified time and you volunteer to be of assistance. A hypnotist is asked to hypnotize you in the hopes of finding the number plate on the SUV. Of course there having been nothing to alert you to the fact that a robbery you wouldn't have recorded the sought after information.

I have been asked on several occasions to assist in enquiries of this kind only to find the information was never stored in the first place. The memory model that I believe to be the most accurate divides memorized events in a manner that allows for an economic storage data in the memory centers of the brain. The theory being that things we witness are temporarily stored in the brain. They are then evaluated for relevance to our interests or needs. If they are deemed relevant, they pass into permanent memory, if not they are kicked out and are not then available.

Although this may seem to limit the value of the possibility of recalling important information, there is experimental proof that more data is actually recorded than the conscious mind can recall. During the Korean War, it was important to know whether the "Enemy" had been in a particular location recently. A patrol was sent out to check for this information. On their return the information they presented consciously was that there was nothing to indicate the enemy presence in the specific location. The members of the patrol were hypnotized and the same information was requested. The hypnotized patrol members reported that there was the smell of a camp fire that had been extinguished, there were freshly broken twigs, and the sound of wildlife was different.

While taking a course in forensic and investigative hypnosis at the Los Angeles Police Department, during the course of one of the lectures, a woman entered the room and harangued the participants for bumping and damaging her car and not leaving any note to identify themselves.

Shortly after this event, the instructor asked for three volunteers to work with the police artist to create likeness of the angry woman. The volunteers were then hypnotized and again asked to help provide her likeness. When the pictures were compared, the original likenesses were found to be nothing like the actual woman, but the ones generated while under hypnosis were all accurate and would have been useful to the police officers if she had been the subject of a crime.

I have been involved in the investigations of two crimes providing useful information. In the first case, a homicide was being investigated. It was important to know whether a man had murdered his wife in the Vancouver area of British Columbia and transported her in the trunk of his to Vancouver Island and dumped her body here, or whether she was murdered on the Island and dumped here. It was important to know whether his vehicle was on a certain ferry or not. One of the ferry crew members with the responsibility for checking the parked vehicles on the car deck of the ferry was brought to me by the police. He had a long work history and it seemed that he also possessed an accurate memory for the vehicles he checked. Under hypnosis, I asked him to relive the time of checking the vehicles on that particular shift. After he had completed the virtual tour of the car deck, I asked him if a particular vehicle, the one the police had described to me, was parked on the car deck. He gave me a categorical "No". It was later proved that his information was valid.

In the next case, a drug related homicide, the police officers believed that two males had murdered a third male in his home. It was thought that they had taken a taxi to the house. A taxi driver was found who said he had delivered two males to the house in question, but he had apparently gotten high on some drugs when interviewed by the officers. Under hypnosis I was able to ascertain that he did have a memory for the two males, and I suggested that when working with the police artist, that he recall them accurately. His memory and the police artist rendering of the two males lead to the arrest of the two men.

It is very important in the selection of subjects for memory recall of significant events under investigation, that the subject be found on questioning to have been in a position to record the sought after information. A hit or miss approach by ignoring this requirement produces overall results that are less useful than the psychics who are often used as a last resort at finding the information.