

Flashing glasses may help PTSD sufferers

September 23 2010, by Lin Edwards

(PhysOrg.com) -- Psychologists in the UK propose using spectacles with flashing lights at each side to identify people likely to develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and possibly to treat them.

Dr. Peter Naish said to BBC his research showed people with PTSD use their brains to process information about the lights in a similar way to people under hypnosis. He said some sufferers seemed to be in a hypnotic state for much of the time, and they can also experience flashbacks and hallucinations that seem real.

Dr. Naish described the case of a survivor of the 2005 terrorist attacks in London who had flashbacks in which she was in the tube train again and believed she was about to die. At other times she thought her brain was confusing her and she was losing [consciousness](#). Her confused state could last for days.

Dr. Naish and Dr. Ksenja da Silva, both of the Open University in Milton Keynes, fixed a tiny light on the top outside edge of each lens of a normal pair of sunglasses. They then flashed the lights on and off in turn, and the wearer was asked to identify which light flashed on first.

The brain consists of two hemispheres, with the left hemisphere believed to be more analytical and concerned with details, and the right more concerned with wider issues. The researchers could tell from which light the subject thought came on first, which hemisphere they were using. They tested two groups of Slovenian refugees, one with PTSD, and the other group without PTSD.

They found subjects without PTSD used both hemispheres of the brain, but some had a preference for the left side, while those suffering from PTSD tended to use their right hemisphere.

Earlier work by Naish and colleagues had identified that people processed the light information differently when they were under hypnosis than when they were not. Under hypnosis they used the right brain in preference, but used the left [brain](#) when not hypnotised. The results with the PTSD sufferers suggest they were in a hypnotic state most of the time.

Only around 30 percent of people who have experienced a traumatic situation go on to develop PTSD. Psychological counseling can help them, but for the 70 percent who will not develop PTSD it can make things worse. Having a means of predicting who is likely to go on to develop the disorder would allow psychologists to identify those most likely to benefit from treatment.

Dr. Naish also said it may be possible to use the glasses to try to “drag people back” to reality if they were putting too much emphasis on their right brains.

The findings were presented at the British Science Association Festival, which ran from September 14 to 19 at Aston University in Birmingham.

Podcast: Dr Peter Naish on [hypnosis](#):

More information: Hypnosis and hemispheric asymmetry, Naish PL. *Conscious Cogn.* 2010 Mar;19(1):230-4. Epub 2009 Nov 8.

www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19900824

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