

Researchers have found evidence for the existence of a hypnotic state

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Researchers have found evidence for the existence of a hypnotic state -- the key was in the glazed staring eyes.

A multidisciplinary group of researchers from Finland (University of Turku and Aalto University) and Sweden (University of Skövde) has found that strange stare may be a key that can eventually lead to a solution to this long debate about the existence of a hypnotic state.

One of the most widely known features of a hypnotized person in the popular culture is a glazed, wide-open look in the eyes. Paradoxically, this sign has not been considered to have any major importance among researchers and has never been studied in any detail, probably due to the fact that it can be seen in only some hypnotized people.

This study was done with a very highly hypnotizable participant who can be hypnotized and dehypnotized by just using a one-word cue. The change between hypnotic state and normal state can thus be varied in seconds.

The researchers used high-resolution eye-tracking methodology and presented a set of well-established oculomotor tasks that trigger automatic eye behavior. They found the glazed stare was accompanied by objectively measurable changes in automatic, reflexive eye behavior that could not be imitated by non-hypnotized participants.

In the field of hypnosis research this result means that hypnosis can no longer be regarded as mental imagery that takes place during a totally normal waking state of consciousness. On the other hand, the result may have wider consequences for psychology and cognitive neuroscience, since it provides the first evidence of the existence of a conscious state in humans that has previously not been scientifically confirmed.

Hypnosis has had a long and controversial history in psychology, psychiatry and neurology. For over 100 years researchers have debated if a special hypnotic state exists or whether it is just about using cognitive strategies and mental imagery in a normal waking state. So far, a hypnotic state has never been convincingly demonstrated, and therefore, many [researchers](#) regard the [hypnotic state](#) to be just a popular myth in psychology.

More information: The results were published in the journal *PLoS ONE* - dx.plos.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0026374

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