

## Short Communication

# Animal Magnetism; A Mesmerizing Yet Controversial Past of Healing Sciences

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DOI:10.29052/IJEHSR.v8.i2.2020.50-55

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Received 20/12/2019

Accepted 11/04/2020

Published 01/06/2020



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## Abstract

**Background:** Animal magnetism gained popularity in the 18th century specifically among Europeans and the people from the United States. The Mesmer's theory on animal magnetism emphasized the presence of invisible natural force in all living organisms i.e. these natural forces exist as magnetic fluid whose abnormal flow was somehow linked to all diseased conditions.

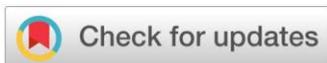
**Methodology:** The article tracks the history and the modern concept of animal magnetism. The literature was searched using the terms Mesmerism, Animal Magnetism, Healing, and French trials, etc. via Google Scholar, PubMed, Research Gate, and Scopus.

**Results:** Mesmer drew the idea in line with scientific advances involving forces; gravity, electricity, and magnetism, etc. Although the magnetic fluid component presumed by his theory didn't work out so well. But his theory marked the beginnings of some very factual and clinically beneficial aspects like hypnosis and healing outcomes.

**Conclusion:** In conclusion, the popular report which was chaired by Franklin, was the main deliberate investigation of what we currently know as hypnosis. While modern-day hypnosis has earned the approval because its effects have been statistically proven in several controlled trials.

## Keywords

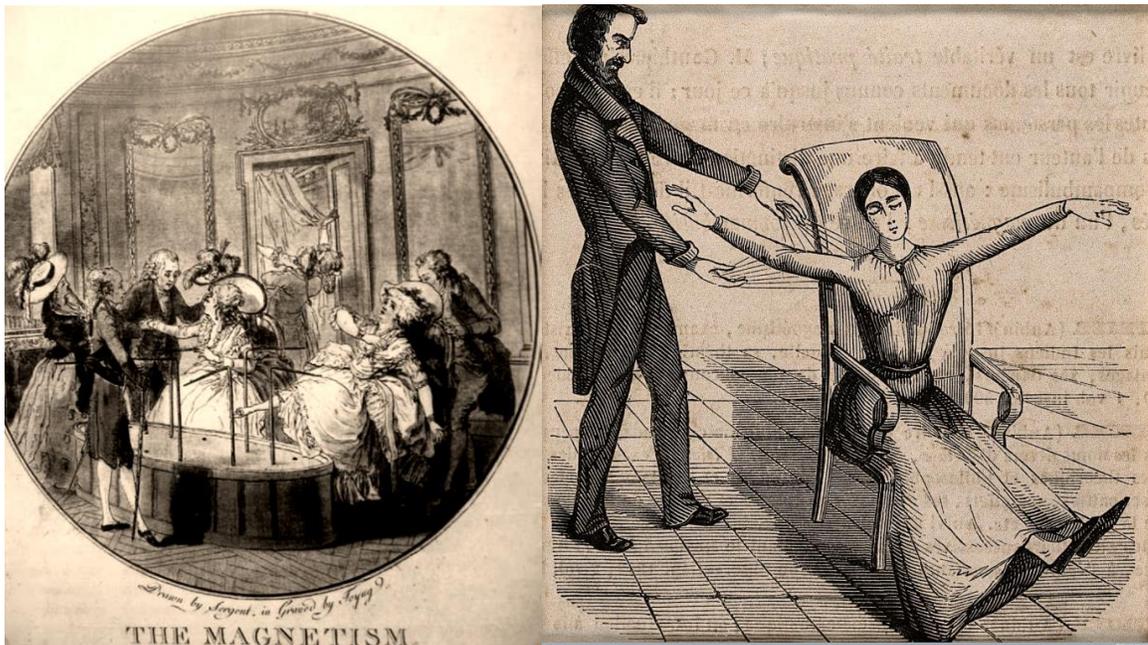
Mesmerism, Animal Magnetism, Healing, Hypnosis.



## Introduction

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Franz Mesmer explained *Lebensmagnetismus* as invisible natural energy possessed by all living organisms including animals, plants, and humans that according to him might have bodily effects specifically healing<sup>1</sup>. The use of a magnetic body progressed into the practice of a healthy individual placing hands over a non-healthy individual to reorder “magnetic fluid” and twitch out any illness. The practices of Mesmer gained fame in Europe, and his claims were supported by prominent individuals but still, conventional therapeutic experts spurned Mesmer and his therapy. Mesmer explicated the phenomenon of animal magnetism based on the belief that the magnetic fluid flows through organisms, Mesmer called for a cogent method for his work and established his theory of universal fluid from Isaac Newton’s electromagnetic aether and laws of attraction,

providing his effort scientific credibility. He also believed that any illness is caused by the uneven distribution of magnetic fluid in the sufferer's body or obstruction of the fluid's natural flow. With that in mind, he believed that health could be restored if the fluid were unblocked. That can be done by controlling the magnetic flow in these people. Initially, he used magnets for the healing processes after the patient had swallowed iron filings<sup>2,3</sup>. Later, he gives out with magnets and used his hands, a wand or an iron rod to control the magnetic fluid through his patients’ bodies for clearing the blockage inside and restore the normal fluidity. After getting magnetized by Mesmer and a few disciples owning unusually strong magnetism, the distressed fell into sleep or dreamy state, frequently followed by a catastrophe in which they would faint or have convulsions. When his patients recovered from these crises, they appeared to be cured of their ailments with flow re-established in the body.



Showing the Magnetism as Mesmer is working on Parisian women settled on his wooden tub filled with iron filings and water

Mesmer claimed that Magnetism could heal various neurological illnesses like headaches and epilepsy, as he assumed that the animal magnetism intimated into the nerves and treated nervous disorders. The treatments were done in a hazy room and Piano to play music sometimes with supplementary sounds and voices. Patients sat in rows around a circular vat, with one of the metal rods given to each person to apply directly to the distressed part of the body. The amalgamation of music, light and solicitations from Mesmer resulted in a form of hypnotism that has been known as mesmerism.

Mesmer's procedure was influential enough to cause some patients to go into seizures and lose consciousness. Although he achieved notable outcomes with numerous of his patients and enthused a lot of followers later, it was followed by controversy<sup>4</sup>.

Mesmer referred proclamations of his philosophies on animal magnetism to conventional academies of science in Europe and other selected scientists for their expert comments<sup>2</sup>. However, he only received a response from Berlin Academy that was also very indifferent, stated that Mesmer's declarations about magnetic effects to be transferred to materials other than iron are contradicting to all previous experiments and his evidence-based on "the sensations of a person suffering from convulsions" was stated as inappropriate for evidencing the reality of the claimed animal magnetism. Moreover, with the truancy of visible effects in healthy individuals the report of "animal magnetism" was listed as highly questionable, and parallel explanations were demanded. The Academy alleged Mesmer for fallen into the misconception of certain things as grounds that were not original. Anton Mesmer was questioned not because of the efficacy of his treatment, rather due to the benefit that did not happen as an outcome of the specific elements or through the definite

physicochemical processes<sup>5</sup>. A Royal Commission lead by Benjamin Franklin and Antoine Lavoisier in 1784, aimed a sequence of trials to interpret Mesmer's, mysterious curing of sicknesses grounded on animal magnetism. Using thoughtful subject ignorance and sham interventions to investigate mesmerism, Franklin's commission provided a model for the controlled clinical trial<sup>6,7</sup>. Though, Mesmer was eager to test his approaches in a controlled trial comparing his technique with traditional management. However, an associate of Mesmer, who had separated from him, took part in the investigation<sup>8</sup>. The associate was Delson, who proved how subjects were 'magnetized' and backed the commission in carrying out experiments. The commission was then able to determine that the fluid is ineffective without imaginings, while the imagination without the fluid can produce the effects that are attributed to the fluid<sup>9</sup>. Analogous efforts to control evidence bias were established and in 1794, dismissed by French researchers who claimed that animal magnetism could mend unsolicited symptoms by enquiring blindfolded patients to assess its effects<sup>10</sup>.

### **The operational heirloom of Animal Magnetism's French trials**

John Haygarth described a single-blind trial using a placebo device<sup>11</sup>, in which it was described in a leaflet entitled 'Of the imagination, as a cause and as a cure of disorders of the body: exemplified by fictitious tractors, and epidemical convulsions'<sup>12</sup>. Haygarth revealed that a set of sham 'tractors' made of wood attained analogous effects to combat the indications of rheumatism just like the effects endorsed to 'magnetic healing' with the use of metal tractors, that was known as 'Perkinism'. Haygarth's report mentions to the Mesmer's experience earlier that the trial illustrated the nature and resembled Animal Magnetism. Though he added that the whole outcome unquestionably depends upon the imprints which can be through the patient's

imagination. There was an obvious acknowledgment of 'placebo effects' within conventional medicine in 1772. However, the controlled trial reported by Lavoisier, colleagues and Haygarth made clear that blinded testing of treatments to control for placebo effects had been hypothesized and applied by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>13</sup>.

An English surgeon in 1837 named Elliotson published a debated view about his experience regarding painless surgery under the influence of mesmeric sleep<sup>14</sup>. Soon after that, Esdaile in 1846 who was a British surgeon, introduced the therapeutic effects of mesmerism that he practiced in British India on a prisoner with a double hydrocele. He claimed that the hydroceles were removed without discomfort or postoperative pain and the curative course was momentarily accelerated. Over the next two years, he performed over 3,000 procedures using the mesmeric process that induced anesthesia. He reported a reduction in post-surgery mortality rate as well. His operations included cataract removals, amputations, orthopedic procedures and tumor removal using mesmerism as the only anesthetic proxy. Esdaile's technique varied the mesmeric orientations, in terms of not using any groundwork, customary, and no voiced/sound communication between mesmerist and sufferer<sup>15</sup>.

The vitalist philosophy fascinated many cliques in the United States and Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Specialists were commonly known as magnetizers rather than mesmerists. It remains as an imperative line of therapy in medicine as long as 75 years since 1779, and impact for another 50 years. Hundreds of books were written on the subject between 1766 and 1925, but it is almost entirely forgotten today. Mesmerism is still in practice as alternative medicine in several regions exclusive of magnetism as a practicing medical science<sup>16</sup>.

Opponents of mesmerism had declared that the process was not really in the true sense and there was not any existing mysterious energy outside of the body but simply an imaginative force dependent on the ordinary workings of the mind. Mesmerism was considered as an example of human imaginative powers, as all the subjects under the effect of mesmerism were the result of powerful imaginations not of any prevalent fluid or power<sup>16</sup>. The clearest change between Mesmer's animal magnetism and contemporary therapeutic hypnosis was signified by James Braid in 1843, who created the term hypnosis by recognizing that most methods of mesmerism at that time involved the production of a sleep-like condition. Braid and fellows recognized definite psychological phenomena of interest but required much more systematic investigation to understand<sup>17</sup>.

Though Franklin commission and Haygarth had differences in opinions about actual and placebo or no treatment there was an evident lack of statistical valuation of their conclusions. The necessary piece of information for modern medical research came around 1919, when the English mathematician, Sir Ronald Fisher, improved Franklin's controlled protocol with the conception of randomization and designs of probability. He claimed that subjects be randomly allocated to a control or cure group to validate statistical comparisons among the 2 groups to a certain level of confidence. Thus, Fisher is known to present the concluding step in creating an up-to-date method of validating the advantage of a specific treatment<sup>18</sup>.

### **Today's mesmerism? Complementary and alternative medicine**

In recent medicine concepts, alternative and complementary medicine are being considered as a current form of mesmerism. Widely popular and considered as pseudoscientific like meditation, reiki, massage therapy, aromatherapy, and homeopathy, etc. Like Mesmer, many alternative and Complementary

therapy practitioners may be connecting the imagination to bring about optimistic results for their patients. While it is difficult to generalize with regards to alternative and Complementary treatments, because of their diversity, common practices like expressions and empathy and time dedication during consultations are recognized to escalate placebo responses. Furthermore, placebo treatments are known to give robust outcomes in chronic conditions like pain, depression and anxiety, somatic disorders, etc<sup>19</sup>. Lastly, the aspects of these treatments that augment placebo responses include patient's belief in the cure, a significant therapeutic grouping, all-inclusive care, etc<sup>20,21</sup>.

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## Conclusion

In conclusion, the popular report which was chaired by Franklin was the main deliberate investigation of what we currently know as hypnosis. Although Franklin realized that belief and hope had compelling healing outcomes, he did not want to make it in public without any demonstrable scientific basis. Modern-day hypnosis has earned the approval because it was statistically proven in controlled trials and placed in level 5 as per the Association of Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback (AAPB) Efficacy Criteria.

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## Conflicts of Interest

None.

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## Acknowledgment

The article was submitted to fulfill the requirements for the doctoral program in Applied Psychophysiology at Saybrook University. I would like to acknowledge the course instructor Prof. Dr. Jerry DeVore and lab supervisor Dr. Sadaf Ahmed for their valuable insights.

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## Funding

None.

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