

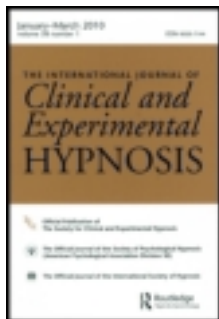
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### Experimental Production of Past-Life Memories in Hypnosis

Young Don Pyun<sup>a</sup> & Yun Joo Kim<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Pyun Neuropsychiatric Clinic, Seoul, South Korea

<sup>b</sup> Hanyang Cyber University, Seoul, South Korea

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## EXPERIMENTAL PRODUCTION OF PAST-LIFE MEMORIES IN HYPNOSIS<sup>1, 2</sup>

YOUNG DON PYUN<sup>3</sup>

*Pyun Neuropsychiatric Clinic, Seoul, South Korea*

YUN JOO KIM

*Hanyang Cyber University, Seoul, South Korea*

**Abstract:** To explore the nature of past-life memories in hypnosis, 64 normal male adults aged 21 to 23 were selected using the Korean version of the Harvard Group Scale of Hypnotic Susceptibility (HGSHS:K) and a simple belief in past-life scale. They all received hypnotic past-life regression 3 times. The influence of HGSHS:K scores on the production rate of past-life memories was statistically significant; however, the influence of belief was not. The percentage of subjects who responded to hypnotic past-life regression increased with hypnotizability. Content analysis showed that cultural background and religious concepts influenced past-life memory production. Animals as past-life identities, for example, were reported whereas all past-life identities were human in a Canadian study.

Past life is one of the common concepts in Korean Buddhism. Most Koreans know about the concept of having a past life. One quarter of Koreans are Buddhists, another quarter Christian, and the remaining one half claims no religion but is influenced by the Confucian tradition (Korea National Statistical Office, 2006). However, past-life regression was only a vague concept in Korea until Korean psychiatrists, influenced by an American past-life psychiatrist (Weiss, 1988, 1992), advertised publicly that they had proved the existence of past lives scientifically via hypnosis. Suddenly hypnosis stood in the middle of a social and religious conflict pitting Buddhists against Christians.

The essence of hypnotic past-life therapy is that past lives affect this life's events; if one discovers those effects in one's past lives, one may

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<sup>3</sup>Address correspondence to Young Don Pyun, Pyun Neuropsychiatric Clinic, 628–10 Yoksamdong, Gangnamgu, Seoul, 135–080, South Korea. E-mail: pyunydn@naver.com

understand and hopefully resolve one's current difficulties, including medical illnesses. The proposed psychotherapy thus involves the hypnotic recovery of memories of past lives.

Concerns about suggestion effects are heightened when hypnosis is utilized (Brewin & Andrews, 1998; Dywan & Bowers, 1983; Nogrady, McConkey, & Perry, 1985; D. Spiegel, 1998). Hypnosis tends to increase productivity but not the percent of accurate retrieval; although its role with emotionally salient and arousing memories has not been adequately studied (American Medical Association, 1985; Klatzky & Erdelyi, 1985). As a result, the general public, and even some medical professionals, believe that it is possible to remember past experiences from past lives in hypnosis. This belief occurs despite the fact that research has clearly indicated that some memories retrieved in hypnosis are in fact pseudomemories (Loftus, Garry, Brown, & Rader, 1994; Lynn, Milano, & Weekes, 1991; Lynn, Myers, & Sivec, 1994; Lynn, Rheu, Myers, & Weekes, 1994; McCann & Sheehan, 1988).

There is evidence that hypnotic past-life memories can be produced by suggestion (Baker, 1982; Spanos, Menary, Gabora, Dubreuil, & Dewhirst, 1991) and that so-called memories of past lives are pseudomemories or confabulations (Hammond et al., 1994; Shames & Bowers, 1992; Spanos, Burgess, & Burgess, 1994). However, in one study using children, suggestibility showed no significant correlation with such confabulations, perhaps because children as a group are more suggestible (Haroldsson, 2003). Past-life memories produced during hypnosis have been described as the product of imagination (Stevenson, 1994).

The use of past-life therapy among professionals has social importance, because it can undermine the credibility of licensed practitioners. Understanding the mechanism of production of past-life memories in hypnosis can help to correct misperceptions about hypnosis and its uses, especially in an era of evidence-based medicine.

## METHOD

This experiment was designed to explore the relations between past-life memory production in hypnotic past-life regression, beliefs in past-life existence, and hypnotizability in normal subjects.

A group of 140 male military police trainees were originally sent to the training camp's auditorium by a military police officer who supported this study. Trainees were required to pass physical- and mental-status examinations when they entered the army. A neutral explanation about the experiment was given and anyone who hesitated to participate was allowed to leave. Sixteen trainees voluntarily left the auditorium before the experiment. All subjects participated voluntarily without payment.

Beliefs with regard to the existence of past-lives were measured by selecting one of the following three statements: "I think past lives exist," "I think past-lives do not exist," or "I don't know or I have never thought about past lives." Results showed that roughly one third was believers, one quarter was nonbelievers, and the remainder chose the neutral answer. Both believers and nonbelievers were included in the study while those who chose the neutral answer were excluded as the purpose of this study was to measure the effect of prior belief on the production of past-life memories in hypnosis.

The HGSHS:K, a Korean version of the Harvard Group Scale of Hypnotic Susceptibility, Form A, (HGSHS:A; Shor & Orne, 1962) was developed and used. Norms for the HGSHS:K have been established (Pyun & Kim, 2009). This scale measures responses to 12 suggestions ranging from easy to difficult to respond to. The score ranges from 0 to 12 (mean = 6.95,  $SD = 2.25$ ).

The number of subjects who had low and high HGSHS:K scores was relatively small compared to those with medium-range scores in both believer and nonbeliever groups. Therefore, we recruited more subjects with low and high HGSHS:K scores from 80 more trainees to provide a more even distribution. As a result, 35 believers and 29 nonbelievers were selected as the study group (Table 1).

Based on previous research (Piccione, Hilgard, & Zimbardo, 1989; Shor, Orne, & O'Connell, 1966; H. Spiegel & Spiegel, 2004), the authors decided that three sessions would allow subjects to reach their plateau hypnotizability.

A neutral explanation about past-life therapy was given before the experiment. In previous studies (Baker, 1982; Spanos et al., 1991), it was found that the production rates of past-life memories were significantly influenced by the preexperimental attitudes of the experimenter toward past-life therapy.

The instructions for past-life regressions were translated from an American past-life therapist's instructions (McClain, 1994) and recorded by a psychiatrist not involved otherwise in the present research. The response booklet of hypnotic past-life regressions included such items as whether memories of a past life were a form of

Table 1  
*Frequencies and Means of HGSHS:K Scores in Two Groups*

	HGSHS:K Scores												Mean ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>t</i>
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12		
Believer ( <i>N</i> = 35)	1	0	0	5	5	7	5	4	4	3	1	0	6.63 (2.21)	-.54
Nonbeliever ( <i>N</i> = 29)	0	1	1	2	3	5	6	4	3	2	2	0	6.93 (2.25)	

visual image or a thought, details of identity, clothing including shoes, familial relationships, ages, seasons, and daily activities.

The experimenter who was present during the hypnotic sessions was not aware of the beliefs of the subjects. Hypnotic past-life regression instructions were then administered via the prerecorded tape. After hypnosis, subjects wrote their responses in the response booklets. This whole procedure was done three times with intervals of 15 minutes between sessions. Subjects were then given debriefing instructions.

Subjects were scored as having remembered a past life when a subject described anything in response to the three trials of hypnotic past-life regression.

## RESULTS

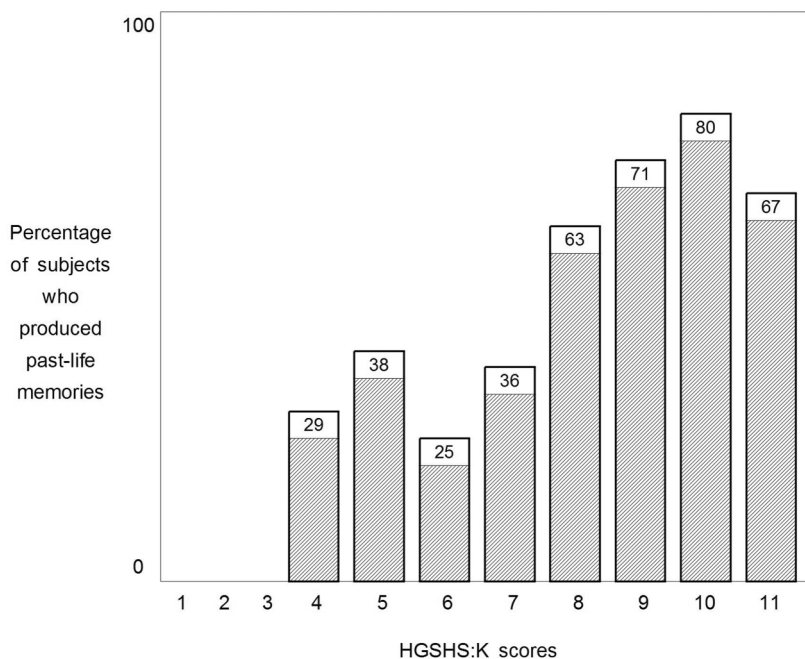
Because our experiment involves three repeated measurements on each of 64 subjects, a random effect logistic regression model (Agresti, 2002; Lee, Nelder, & Pawitan, 2006) that accounts for the clustering effect of repeated measurements on the same subject was used to examine the relationship between the percentage of subjects that responded positively (e.g., production rates of past-life memories) to the hypnotic past-life regression and hypnotizability as measured by the HGSHS:K when adjusted for hypnotic past-life regression trials and prior belief. The results are summarized in Table 2.

Our results indicated that people with high hypnotizability as measured by the HGSHS:K were more likely than those with low hypnotizability to respond positively in hypnotic past-life regression (odds ratio[OR] = 2.02, 95% confidence interval [CI] = 1.34–3.07,  $p < .01$ ). Their prior belief, however, had no effect on the production rate of past-lives memories (OR = 0.80, 95% CI = 0.16–4.08,  $p > 0.5$ ).

When illustrated with a figure, a statistically significant correlation between the percentage of subjects who produced past-life memories in hypnosis (e.g., positive response in hypnotic past-life regression) according to the HGSHS:K scores are informative (Figure 1).

Table 2  
*Production Rates of Past-Life Memories in Hypnosis, e.g., Percentage of Positive Response in Hypnotic Past-Life Regression, According to HGSHS:K Scores and Preexperimental Belief on Past Life*

	OR	95% CI	<i>p</i>
HGSHS:K	2.02	1.34–3.07	< .01
Belief	0.80	0.16–4.08	> .50



**Figure 1.** The percentage of subjects who produced past-life memories in hypnosis (e.g., positive response in hypnotic past-life regression) according to the HGSHS:K scores.

Among 35 subjects in the believer group, 15 subjects produced memories of past lives. Six were visual in form, and the other 9 were in the form of thoughts. Among 29 subjects in the nonbeliever group, 13 produced memories of past lives. Seven were visual in form and the other 6 were in the form of thoughts.

As an identity of their past life, 4 subjects reported conversion of species, e.g., animal (tiger, fox, deer, and bear), 2 reported conversion of sex (male to female), and 2 reported conversion of race (Korean to Caucasian). Nine reported multiple identities, and 2 reported single identity in their three hypnotic past-life regression trials. Most of them reported being the same age as their present life (8 out of 10 age reports.). Having a past life during the Yi Dynasty, which lasted 500 years (more than 100 years have passed since its fall) was the most frequent time period given (4 out of 8), and Korea was the most frequent country reported (9 out of 11). When the contents of production were examined, past-life believers with high HGSHS:K scores showed the most detailed contents.

## DISCUSSION

The production of past-life memories in hypnosis was significantly correlated with hypnotizability as measured by the HGSHS:K but had no correlation with prior belief in past lives. In a previous study (Spanos et al., 1991), it was found that the mean CURSS (Carleton University Responsiveness to Suggestion Scale) score was significantly higher in past-life responders than no-past-life responders ( $2.48 > 1.61$ ;  $p < .05$ ). It also showed that religious beliefs and belief in reincarnation did not differ in both groups.

The result of this experiment shows no correlation between the production rate of past-life memories and a preexperimental belief in the existence of past lives. Past-life memories were produced both in believers and nonbelievers at the same rate. This result is consistent with a previous study (Spanos et al., 1991) in which suggestion played a more influential role in the production of past-life memories than religious beliefs.

The percentage of positive response was the same in high HGSHS:K-score subjects regardless of previous belief, but past-life believers showed more detailed contents than nonbelievers. Imaginative involvement and fantasy proneness are reported to be significantly correlated with scores on the HGSHS:A (Siuta, 1996; Spanos, 1996). For the believers, it may be easier and more ego syntonic to fantasize having past lives.

Four subjects reported animals as their past-life identities. One reported being a tiger in two trials; the other reported being a fox and a deer in each trial, respectively. The other 2 were bears. The tiger and bear are animals that represent a hero and a heroine who wanted to be humans in the legendary tale of the foundation of Korea. There were no reports of animals as past-life identities among the 110 subjects in a Canadian study (Spanos et al., 1991). This is probably due to the different understanding of reincarnation that exists between Koreans and Canadians. Canada and most Western countries' concepts are based on the New Age, a kind of religious movement originated from Christianity mixed with some dogmas derived from Hinduism and Buddhism, whereas Korea's is based mostly on Buddhism; although the New Age concept of reincarnation is increasingly recognized recently. The Buddhist reincarnation concept originated from Hinduism. In New Age, one will be reincarnated as a human being but in Hinduism one may be reincarnated as not only a human being but also as an animal or even as a lifeless object (Howe, 1974; MacGregor, 1978; Parrinder, 1983). In Korean Buddhism, some teach that one is a human because one did many good deeds in one's past life when one was an animal. This difference in religious doctrine on reincarnation probably explains this experiment's results, i.e., animals as past-life identities.



Two subjects reported changes in nationality. In the Canadian (Spanos et al., 1991) study all subjects ( $N = 110$ ) reported North America and European countries as their past-life nationalities, except 1 who reported being a New Zealander. In this research, among the 28 subjects who reported past-life experiences, 9 reported being Korean in their past lives and 2 reported being Americans while the rest reported no description about their nationality. Considering these results, easily imaginable or favorite countries tended to be produced as the countries of past lives.

Many subjects reported personal identity changes in different trials. Among the 4 subjects who reported past-life memories in all three trials, 3 reported different identities (75%), and among the 7 subjects who reported past-life memories in two trials, 6 reported different identities (85%). These percentages are similar to the percentage rate of 75 % ( 9/12) in Baker's study (1982). All subjects who reported different identities and detailed contents in each trial were highly hypnotizable.

All of this experiment's subjects were young adult males. This may result in limited applicability to the general population, and it would be interesting to investigate if women respond in a similar way.

## CONCLUSION

The results of this experiment show that the production rates of past-life memories in hypnosis are significantly correlated with the scores of the HGSHS:K. The production rate shows no correlation with preexperimental beliefs in past lives, which is consistent with an earlier Canadian study (Spanos et al., 1991). The contents of past-life memories produced were related to cultural background and religious concepts of the country.

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### Die experimentelle Manipulation von "Vorleben"-Erinnerungen unter Hypnose

Young Don Pyun und Yun Joo Kim

**Zusammenfassung:** Zur Untersuchung von Vorleben-Erinnerungen unter Hypnose wurden 64 normale Erwachsene (21 – 23 Jahre) mithilfe der koreanischen Version der Harvard Group Scale of Hypnotic Susceptibility (HGSHS:K) und einer Skala zur Bestimmung des "Glauben an ein Vorleben" ausgewählt. Alle empfingen dreimal Suggestionen zur Regression in ein "früheres Leben". Der Zusammenhang zwischen HGSHS :K-Werten und der Erzeugung von Erinnerungen an Vorleben war statistisch signifikant, wohingegen kein Zusammenhang zu den Werten auf der Skala "Glauben an ein Vorleben" festgestellt wurde. Der Prozentsatz der Teilnehmer die auf die Vorleben-Regression ansprachen nahm mit steigender Hypnosefähigkeit zu. Inhaltsanalyse zeigte, dass der kulturelle Hintergrund sowie religiöse Konzepte die Erzeugung von Erinnerungen beeinflussten. Vorlebens-Identitäten als Tiere wurden in dieser Studie berichtet, was im Gegensatz zu den Ergebnissen einer kanadischen Studie steht, wo alle Identitäten menschlicher Natur waren.

RALF SCHMAELZLE

*University of Konstanz, Konstanz, Germany*

### La production expérimentale de souvenirs de vies antérieures par l'hypnose

Young Don Pyun et Yun Joo Kim

**Résumé:** Afin d'examiner la nature des souvenirs de vies antérieures rappelés sous hypnose, 64 adultes normaux de sexe masculin âgés de 21 à 23 ans ont été sélectionnés pour répondre à la version coréenne du questionnaire de l'échelle de susceptibilité hypnotique du Groupe de Harvard (HGSHS:K) et à un questionnaire simple de croyance en la vie antérieure. Les participants ont, à trois reprises, reçu des suggestions hypnotiques de régression. L'influence des scores HGSHS:K sur la production de souvenirs de vies antérieures a été statistiquement significative; l'influence de la croyance en l'existence de vies antérieures, par contre, ne l'a pas été. Le pourcentage des sujets ayant réagi à la régression sous hypnose augmentait avec le degré d'hypnotisabilité des participants. L'analyse du contenu a démontré l'influence des antécédents culturels et des concepts religieux sur la production de souvenirs de vies antérieures. Par exemple, on fait état de participants qui s'étaient identifiés

à des animaux dans des vies antérieures, alors que, dans une étude canadienne, toutes les identités déclarées de vies antérieures étaient humaines.

JOHANNE REYNAULT  
*C. Tr. (STIBC)*

### La producción experimental de memorias de vidas pasadas con hipnosis

Young Don Pyun y Yun Joo Kim

Resumen: Para explorar la naturaleza de las memorias de vidas pasadas en hipnosis, seleccionamos a 64 adultos varones normales de 21 a 23 años con la versión coreana de la Escala Grupal de Susceptibilidad Hipnótica de Harvard (HGSHS:K) y una escala simple sobre la creencia en vidas pasadas. Todos recibieron regresiones hipnóticas a vidas pasadas 3 veces. La influencia de las puntuaciones en el HGSHS:K en la producción de memorias de vidas pasadas fue estadísticamente significativas, sin embargo no fue así con la influencia de la creencia. El porcentaje de respondientes a la regresión a vidas pasadas aumentó con la hipnotizabilidad. El análisis de contenido mostró que antecedentes culturales y conceptos religiosos influyeron en la producción de memorias de vidas pasadas. Se mencionaron animales como identidades de vidas previas, en tanto que todas las vidas anteriores en un estudio canadiense fueron de seres humanos.

ETZEL CARDEÑA  
*Lund University, Lund, Sweden*