



## On the Origin of the Hysterical Conversion Disorder

- ✓ c. 1900 BC - the **Egyptians** discover that certain health problems seem to occur mainly in women ... they blame these disorders on the presumed discontent of the female womb which they further believe could move willfully around the body. Treatments are often bizarre procedures designed to lure the womb back to its proper place.
- ✓ c. 400 BC - the **Greeks** dub this disorder **HYSTERIA**, from their word for womb. Treatment focuses on attempts to appease this presumably "starved" organ by prescribed marriage for single women and increased conjugal activity for the married.
- ✓ c. 1500 - in the Middle Ages, symptoms such as epileptiform seizures, are often attributed to possession & witchcraft. Persons so afflicted are either described as having been bewitched by another or as having purposefully entered into an evil union with the devil themselves. Physicians, moreover, have difficulty distinguishing HYSTERIA from POSSESSION. In addition, it is still viewed as principally a female problem and many women die--accused of witchcraft-- in this unfortunate misogynist environment. 
- ✓ c. 1780 - Mesmer, via his *seances* & purported "**animal magnetism**" powers "cures" large numbers of persons demonstrating the legitimacy of the placebo effect and the power of suggestion! 
- ✓ c. 1885 - Charcot, in France, concludes that if a person could be hypnotized, that was sufficient evidence to diagnose HYSTERIA. He goes on to show that hysterical patients can be cured through hypnotism, again confirming the power of suggestion.

- ✓ 1895 – Freud publishes *Studies in Hysteria* which presents his views on what he is calling “hysterical neurosis.” To the astonishment of his medical associates( who, while having abandoned the “wandering womb” theory long ago, still believed the condition to be exclusively female) Freud introduces the idea that the condition can occur in men as well as women. He explains this disorder using his theories of unconscious dynamic processes. The disorder’s traditional association with sexuality, however, remains. Freud’s “talking cure,” furthermore, evokes cures just as efficiently as Mesmer’s and Charcot’s before him.
- ✓ 1987 – the DSM IIIR confuses the issue a bit by retaining the term *Hysterical Neurosis* and differentiating between *Conversion Type* & *Dissociative Type* while separating out other “hysterical” symptomatology under the *Somatoform Disorders Group*, viz., Somatization Disorder.
- ✓ 1994- the DSM IV drops the *Hysterical Neurosis* terminology, moves *hysterical neurosis, conversion type* to the Somatoform Disorders group, moves *hysterical neurosis, dissociative type* to the Dissociative Disorders group. The DSM IV code for CONVERSION DISORDER is 300.11



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