

# Re-discovering Hypnosis Again for the First Time: The Utilization of Attentional Processes in Short-Term Psychotherapies

with

**Michael D. Yapko, Ph.D.**

December 15, 2017



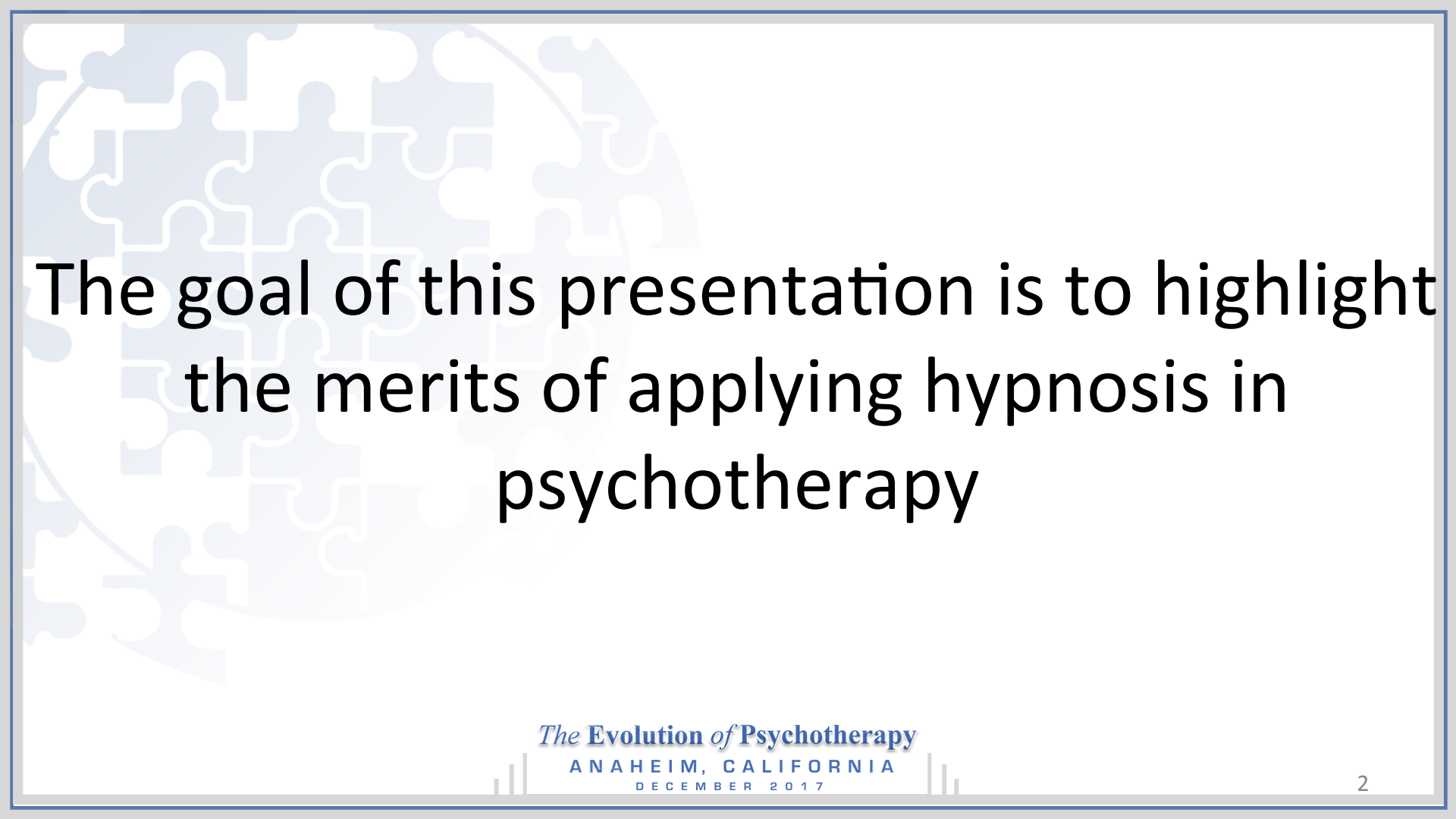
Focusing  
on Your  
Strengths

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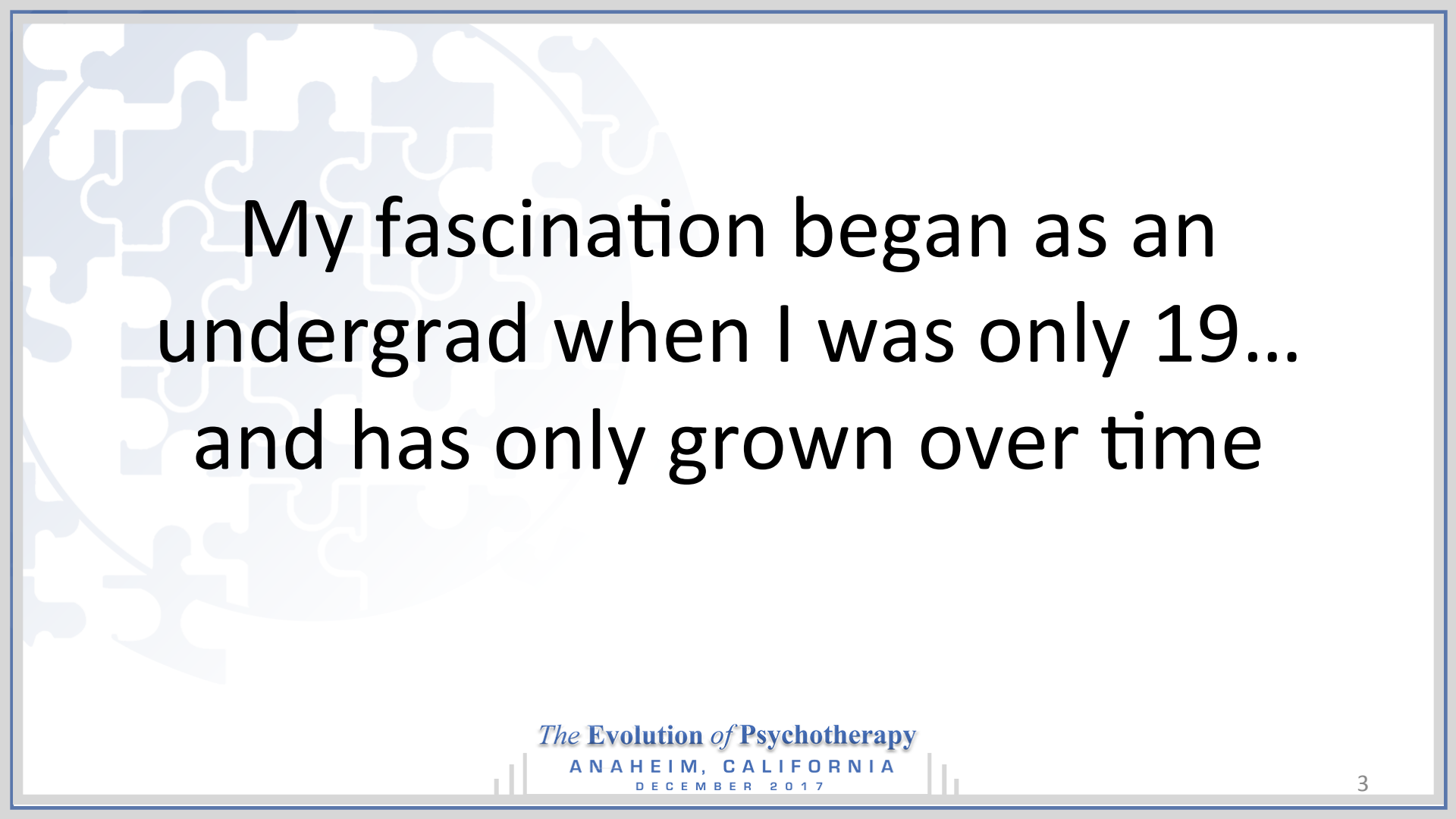


The goal of this presentation is to highlight  
the merits of applying hypnosis in  
psychotherapy

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My fascination began as an  
undergrad when I was only 19...  
and has only grown over time

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# Hypnosis Highlights

## the Malleability of Subjective Experience

- Suggested alterations can take place in memory, cognitive, sensory, temporal, relational, or affective realms of personal awareness.
- These may give rise to dramatic and seemingly spontaneous experiences of insight, transcendence, and personal transformation.

Modern clinical hypnosis employs attentional focusing strategies to elicit healing resources the client may not even know he or she has, empowering him or her in the process

# The Key Questions Any Curious Clinician Might Consider:

- How does paying attention – focusing – translate into non-volitional (i.e., automatic) yet meaningful responses?
- Why do some people respond so dramatically to experiential processes such as hypnosis or mindfulness, finding them “transformative,” while others respond minimally?
- What general factors determine one’s capacity to respond?
- What role do specific sociocognitive factors such as expectancy, suggestibility, and dissociation play in client responsiveness?
- Can an individual’s quality of responsiveness be increased?

# Some of the Many Key Domains of Hypnotic Inquiry

- Neuroscience, neural mechanisms, and morphological differences across individuals
- The inevitable role of suggestion in any intervention
- Hypnotic responsiveness (hypnotizability) as a general phenomenon
- Differences in hypnotizability across individuals and groups, including the social and cognitive factors that underlie responsiveness

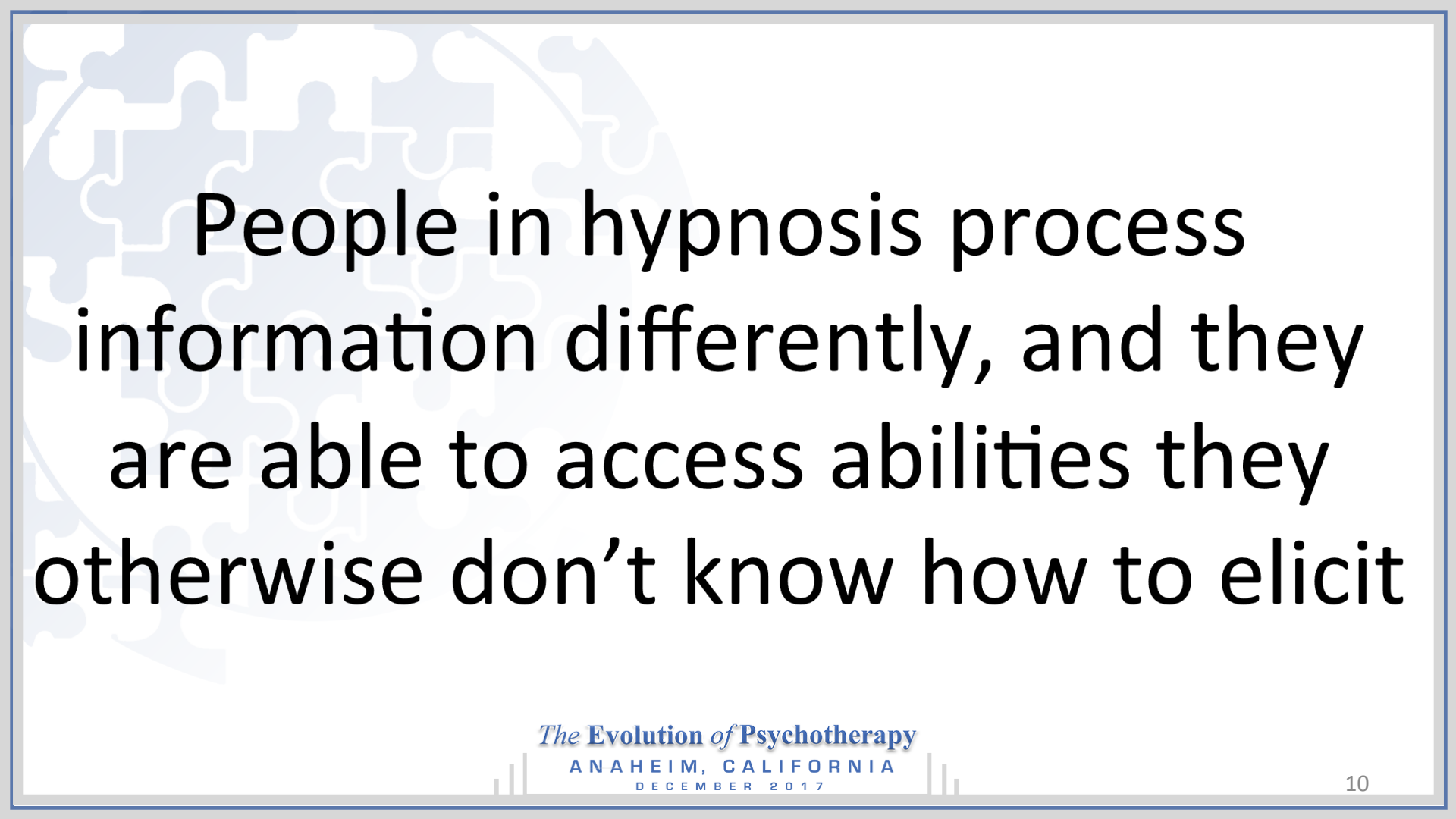
# Some of the Many Key Domains of Hypnotic Inquiry

- The relationship between attentional processes, capacity for dissociation, and perceptual malleability
- The capacity to influence experience non-consciously and generate non-volitional responses (e.g., priming, automaticity)
- Efficacy of clinical applications across diagnostic categories in mental and physical health
- The limits of capacities to transform human experience

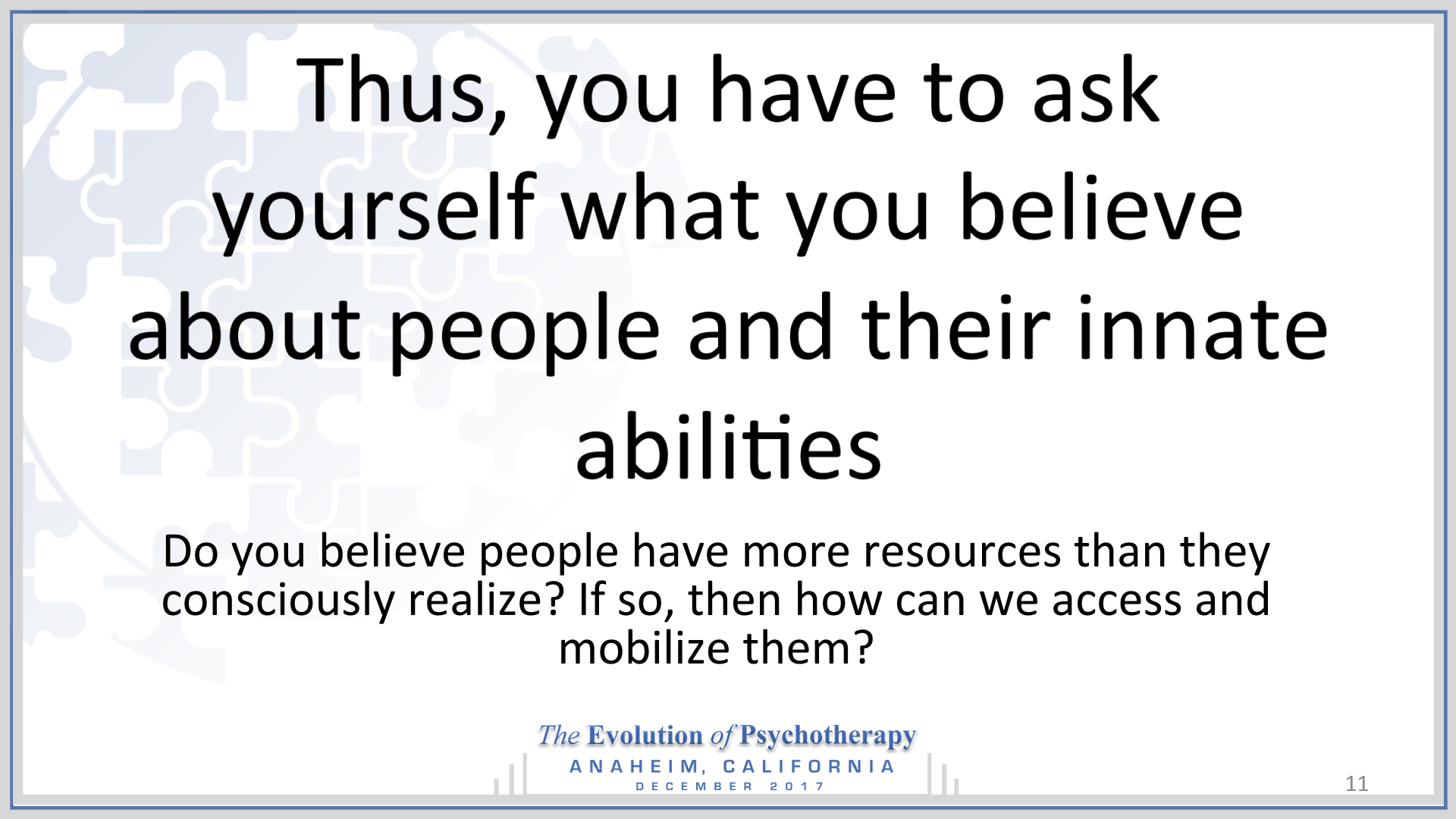


# Hypnosis Provides Vital Insights Regarding:

- Brain functions
- Information processing
- Mind-body relationships; epigenetics
- Expectancy and treatment response
- Components of clinical effectiveness
- Relationship (therapeutic alliance) dynamics

The background features a faint, light blue graphic of interlocking puzzle pieces arranged in a circular pattern, with a globe-like shape in the center. The text is overlaid on this graphic.

People in hypnosis process information differently, and they are able to access abilities they otherwise don't know how to elicit



# Thus, you have to ask yourself what you believe about people and their innate abilities

Do you believe people have more resources than they consciously realize? If so, then how can we access and mobilize them?

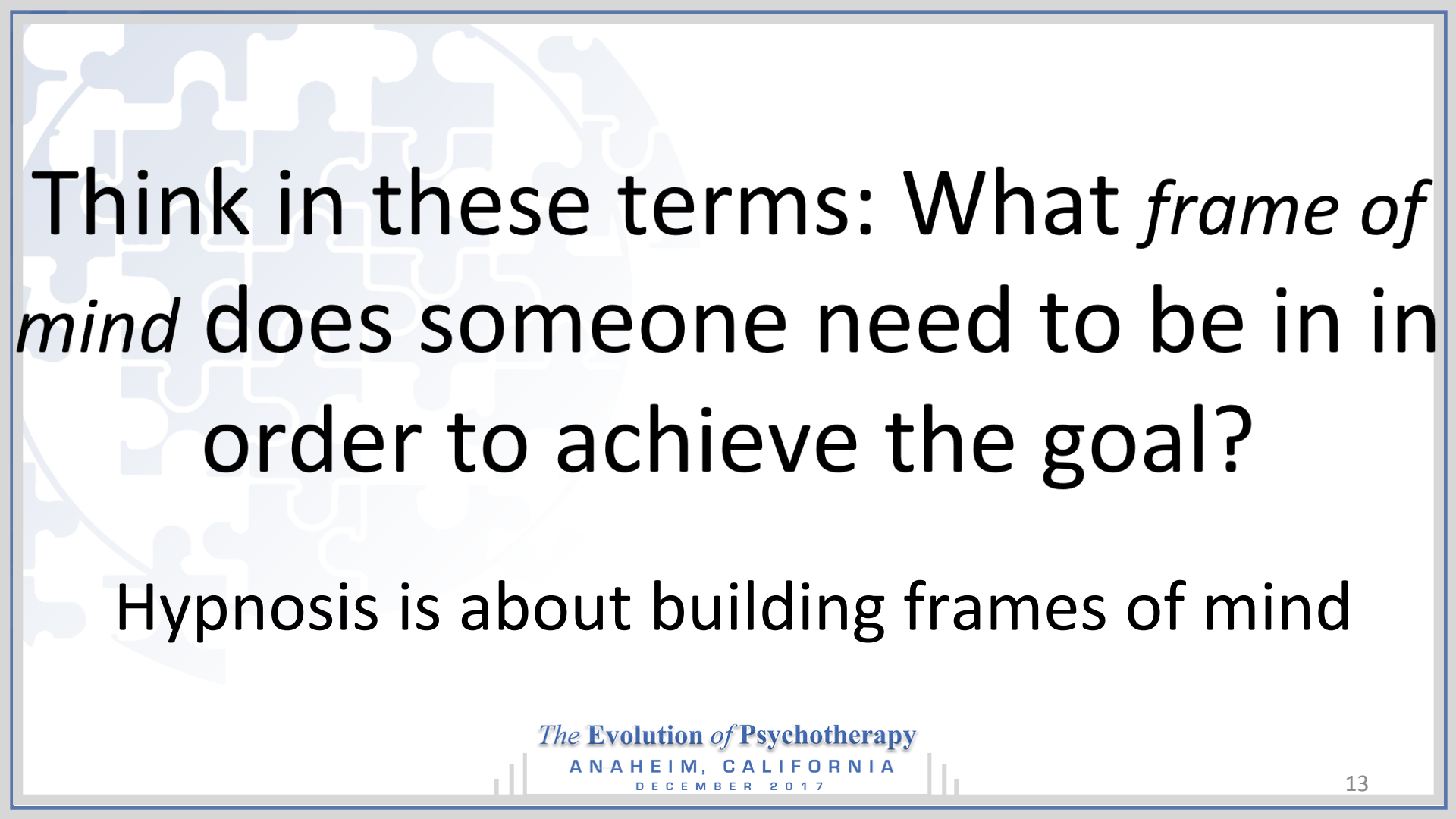


# Some foundational perspectives about hypnosis

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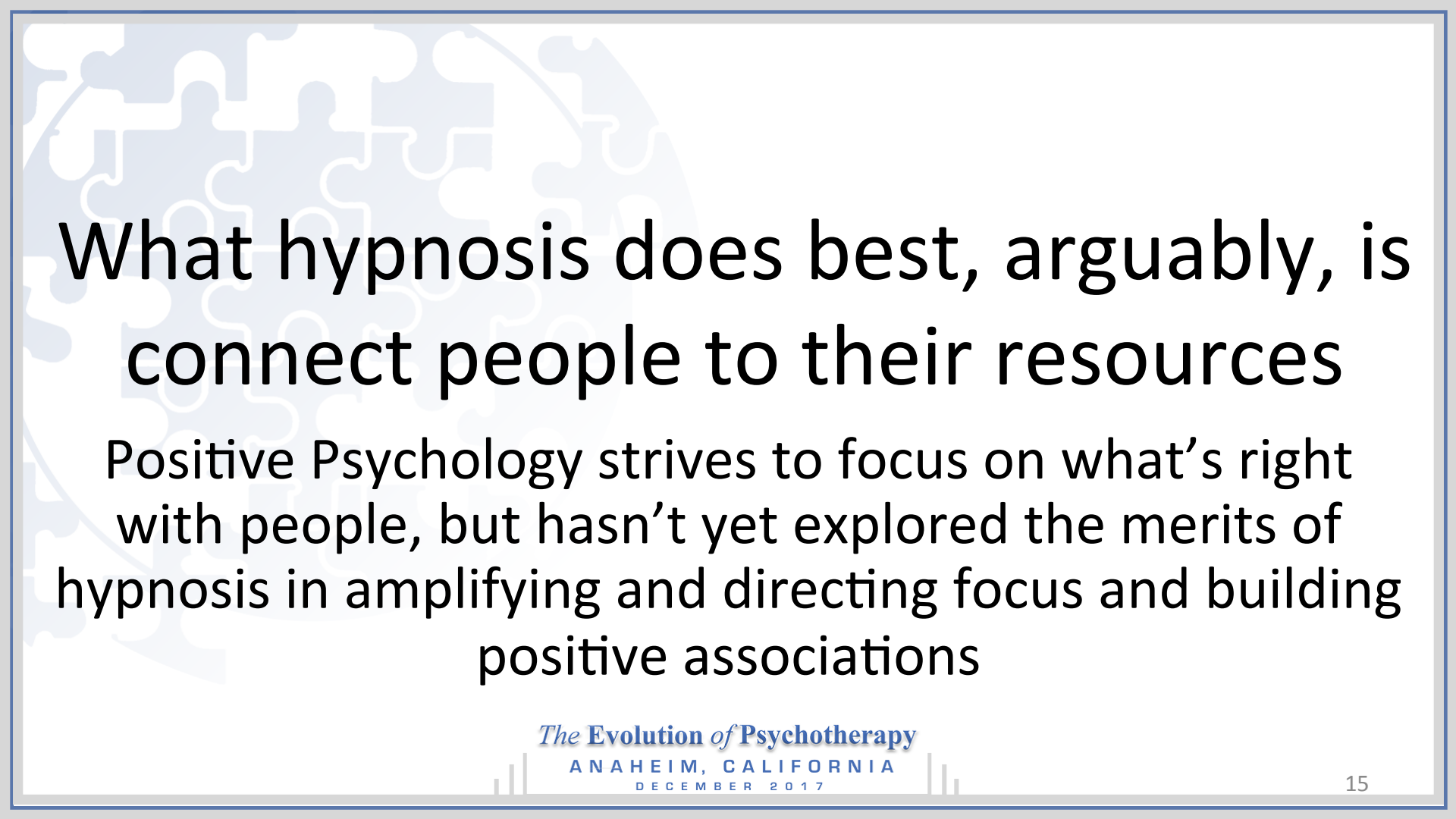


Think in these terms: What *frame of mind* does someone need to be in in order to achieve the goal?

Hypnosis is about building frames of mind

# Hypnosis Isn't A Good Thing...Or Bad

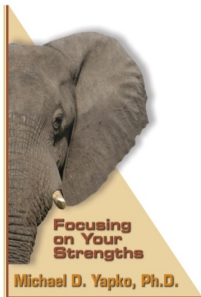
Hypnosis is *neutral*, capable of generating either therapeutic or symptomatic experience. We're here to consider the therapeutic applications, of course.



# What hypnosis does best, arguably, is connect people to their resources

Positive Psychology strives to focus on what's right with people, but hasn't yet explored the merits of hypnosis in amplifying and directing focus and building positive associations

So often, the foundation of peoples' problems is found in their focusing on aspects of experience that work against them

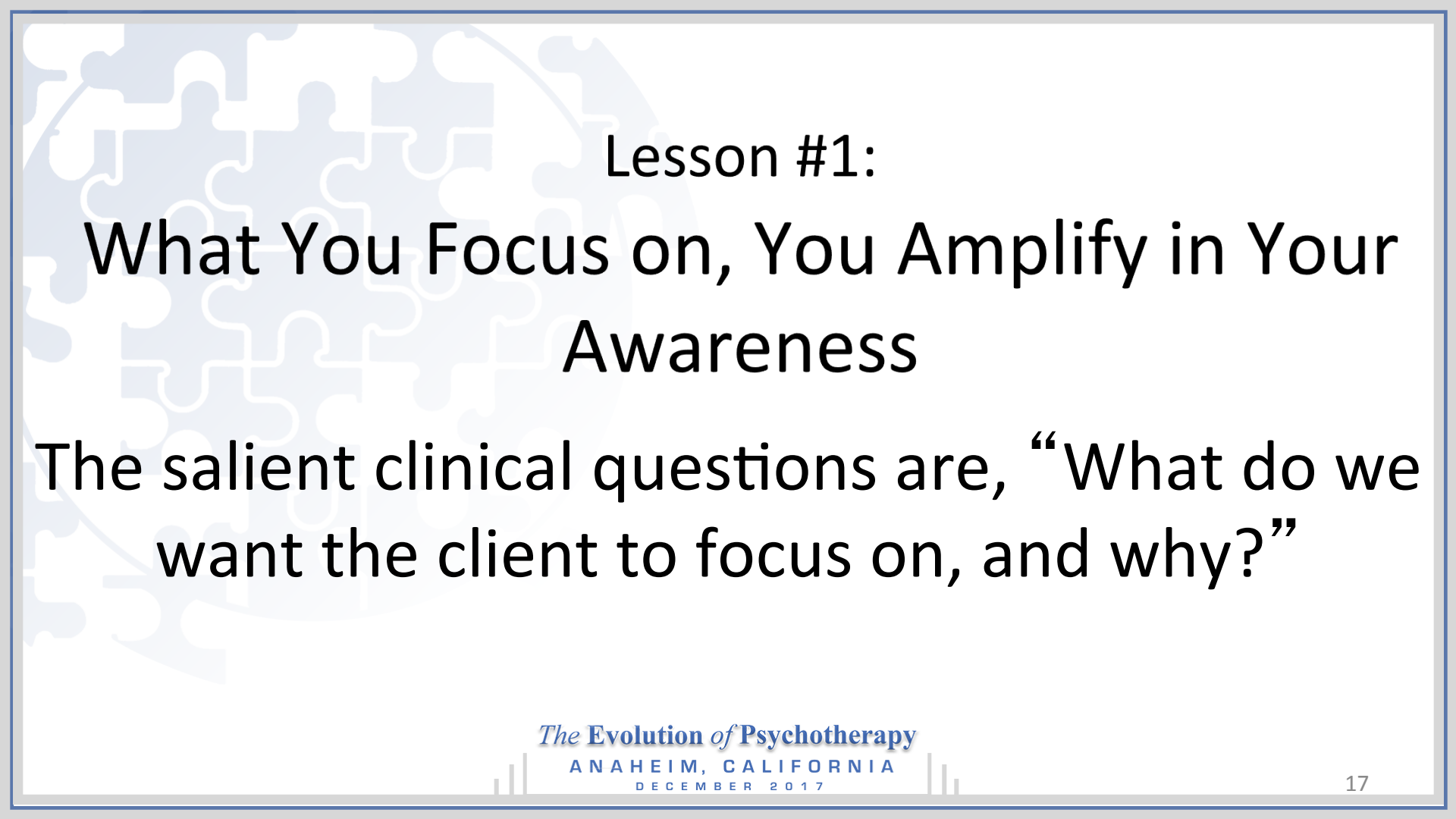


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Lesson #1:  
What You Focus on, You Amplify in Your  
Awareness

The salient clinical questions are, “What do we want the client to focus on, and why?”



# Does Hypnosis Cure People?

NO! It's what happens ***DURING*** hypnosis -  
the new and beneficial associations the  
client forms

# Thus, the Salient Question...

Is **NOT**, “Does hypnosis cure problem X?” Rather, the salient question is, “If one applies therapy approach Y *without* hypnosis and applies therapy approach Y *with* hypnosis, will the addition of hypnosis to the process likely enhance the treatment outcome?”

The evidence suggests the answer is **yes**.

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Is hypnotizability learnable, changeable?

Will practice enhance hypnotic  
responsiveness?

How does your belief influence your clinical  
practice?

What about ***single session*** hypnotic  
interventions that yield enduring results?

The value of experiential learning is critically important, especially in the clinical context



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# During Hypnosis, People Can Experience Marked Shifts in:

- **Physiology** (breathing slows, muscles relax, detached, etc.)
- **Sensory perception** (temperature, weight, sensitivity, size, distance, etc.)
- **Cognition** (thoughts clearer, slower, detached)
- **Affect** (happier, sadder, curious, accepting, etc.)
- **Behavior** (self-help, new behavior, proactive, etc.)
- **Temporal orientation** (past, present, future focus)
- **Self-definition** (more resourceful, competent, etc.)

## Now Go Away... (Sort of): Dissociation as a Foundation

- In order to change experience, transform it in some way, there must be some degree of *detachment*.
- Different modalities use different language to describe this quality of detachment (e.g., “see it from another perspective,” “selflessness,” “flow,” “altered state of consciousness,” etc.)
- Hypnosis has been studying this phenomenon from its earliest days, and terms it ***dissociation***

# Consider the Role of Detachment in Different Therapies

Detach from:

- the pain in order to manage it
- the emotion and be more rational
- the past and be more present
- the fear and do it anyways
- situational triggers and react differently
- the wish and be more accepting
- the inner critic and be more compassionate



# Dissociation and Automaticity

- In hypnosis, dissociation becomes especially evident when people respond non-volitionally, that is, without conscious effort, to a suggestion. For example, a clinician might suggest an experience of lightness or warmth in his or her body; Suggestions are offered for the client to *allow* the experience of lightness or warmth. The client is not aware of expending any effort to respond, instead the feelings of lightness or warmth seem to “*just happen.*”

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# Dissociation as a Therapeutic Tool

- Dissociation involves the ability to break global experiences into their components parts; it features an ability to compartmentalize or separate elements of experience from one another
- Who has this capacity, and to what degree?
- Can it be learned? Practiced and developed as a skill? What determines someone's capacities in this regard?

# Suggesting Seeing in Color vs. Black and White

- Conducted at Harvard University by Stephen Kosslyn and colleagues, the study employed PET scans to find out whether hypnosis could be used to modulate color perception. Ss were shown a series of patterns, some involving colors and some only shades of gray while in waking and hypnotized conditions.
- Color stimuli were shown to be processed in a separate brain region than the gray stimuli.

*Kosslyn et al., Am J of Psychiatry, 2000, 157, 1279-1284*

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It is a well-established fact that people differ in their degree of hypnotic responsiveness.

What are the characteristics of those who are termed “highly hypnotizable” (HH) relative to those who are termed “low hypnotizables” (LH)?

# General Ways to Use Hypnosis

- **Symptom management strategies** (e.g., enhancing sleep, reducing anxiety)
- **Skill-building/resource accessing** (e.g., enhancing cognitive flexibility, building problem-solving skills)
- **De-framing and reframing** (e.g., “It’s not you, it’s the way you go about it”)
- **Association and dissociation** (e.g., shifting focus away from feelings to action, shifting focus from past to future)



Hypnosis creates an **opportunity**, a context for converting possibilities into meaningful responses

We can invite the client to be an **active participant** in the process, honoring his or her uniqueness and talents that can be focused and expanded

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# The Case of Morgan: A Brief Demonstration of Hypnosis for **Recovery of Hand Functions Following a Pediatric Stroke in a Teen**

The following demonstration, recorded simply on a smart phone during a session, is by my student and colleague, psychotherapist **Ron Bishop, MFT**, from Texas. It illustrates well hypnosis as a vehicle for **creating possibilities**

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# Summary of Key Points

- Capacity for absorption varies across individuals and also within individuals at various times
- Therapeutic focus can be enhanced by structuring a time and means for developing the capacity
- Such processes are not curative in and of themselves, but help establish new subjective associations that may be therapeutic
- Learning the structure of such processes allows you to vary your approaches according to individual needs and to create a context that generates responses you couldn't have predicted



# Thank you for coming and for your kind attention

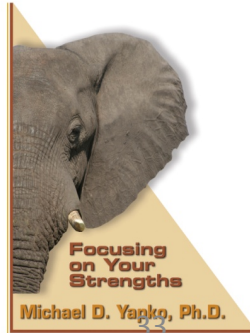
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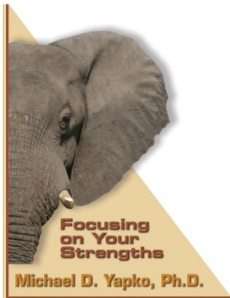
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