

Eyes Blinking Reaction and Its Use in Hypnotic Communication

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There are many ways for the subject's unconsciousness to express the non-verbal message that is additional to the conscious message. Microanalysis of Dr. Erickson's videotaped communication shows that he used the subject's and his own non-verbal behavior for building rapport, getting the most important information and conducting the communication on the unconscious level. Following Dr. Erickson's approach, we have been investigating meanings and appropriate use of the non-verbal behavioral cues that every person demonstrates naturally and that can serve for delivering some messages. The investigation has shown that the unconscious mind can use automatic tongue movements (4), eyes blinking and many other natural reactions as signals of secondary language (the secondary language is the process of communication that helps in the delivery of indirect message). That means that if we take those reactions into consideration, decode their meanings and use them in communication we can move our communication to a deep unconscious level that will lead to strong, stable and predictable positive psychotherapeutic changes. The article describes different types of eyes blinking the way that each type can be used in psychotherapy as signals that turn unconscious understanding into conscious one. (*Sleep and Hypnosis* 2001;3(2):93-96)

Key words: *unconscious communication, eyes blinking, patient's message, conscious and unconscious understanding*

INTRODUCTION

One of the main ideas of Dr. Erickson is the idea that it is necessary to investigate patients' natural communication as a process that contains and expresses some unconscious message:

"Consciously chosen words, thoughts, and acts can mean more than one thing at a time: their conscious or manifest content on the one hand, and a latent, unconscious content on the other." (1; v. III, chap. 16 p. 156)

"His unconscious mind can communicate directly and adequately and is free to make whatever com-

munication it wishes, whether by sign language, verbally or in both manners." (1; v. I, chap. 13, p.309)

"Communication can be verbal, but it is also quite obvious that there is a great deal of nonverbal communication. Communication can be an angry look, a lovely look - all kinds of looks and all kinds of gestures." (1; v. II, chap. 31, p.328)

Taking this idea as an instruction we have become particularly interested in the analysis of the dynamic non-verbal cues (signals) that can produce and express some unconscious meanings quickly and easily. So our attention was attracted to the process of eyes blinking. We observed and analyzed the regularities of the connection between patients' eyes blinking and the words that they say when complaining. This way we found out two well-defined forms of blinking that are connected with speech.

The first is single blinking that coincides with a word in subject's speech. It also can happen

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Accepted August 17, 2000

between two said words. The single blinking can be accompanied by some other expression as well. The second form of blinking is a serial or multiple blinking when several fast blinks happen almost without intervals. We have analyzed all those cases and now can suggest the way to understand this part of patients' behavior. Our observation has shown that the blinking is connected to the patient's speech because of some unconscious automatic process that takes place while the person is speaking. It is surprising that speech and blinking are thought to be independent parallel processes. We have found out that speech and blinking are closely connected processes.

1. Single Blinking

1.1. Single Blinking That Takes Place When Some Particular Word is Said

Single blinking is a fast process and usually it coincides with only one word. Here we are going to analyze this type of single blinking. Observations and researches have shown that single blinking is similar to the conscious - unconscious cues (signals) that emphasize some particular words. These signals accompany the process of transition of the unconscious understanding into conscious one. We can consider different cases:

(a) the situation when a person consciously is emphasizing some words in speech; the subject wanted to emphasize these words and he did so;

(b) the situation when some words were pointed by some automatic expression, the subject didn't intend to emphasize these words; if we drive his attention to that fact he will agree that the emphasis was appropriate and significant;

(c) the situation when some words were pointed by some automatic expression but the subject doesn't agree that the emphasis was appropriate and meaningful.

This difference can be shown in the following experiment:

A subject was asked to read aloud some text from a book. While he was reading some words were pointed by blinking and some other expression and some words were pointed only by blinking. After reading the text aloud, the subject was asked to underline some significant words consciously. All the words that were pointed by blinking and other expression were underlined. Only a few of the words

that were pointed by blinking were underlined in the text.

In result, first, some words were underlined and pointed by blinking and other expression. When the subject was asked why those words are significant he explained their meaning very willingly and easily. Those meanings were connected to the personal reaction to the content of the text. Some words were underlined but not pointed by blinking or any other expression. When the subject was asked about the significance of those words the subject also responded easily. That was a conscious response. Those meanings were formally connected to the content of the text. And Second, there were some words that were pointed only by blinking. And when the subject was asked about the significance of those words at first he looked just a little bit confused but then he started explaining their significance and finally found some explanation why those meanings are more important than other. Those meanings were always deep personal associations to the text, connected to the life experience of the person.

This experiment shows that blinking is connected to conscious -unconscious meanings and it demonstrates the process of the transformation of unconscious understanding into the conscious one. So when the words are pointed only by eyes blinking that corresponds with the stage when unconscious understanding is, so to say, ready to turn into conscious understanding. When the words are pointed by blinking and also by other expression that is the stage of a new conscious understanding being formed.

There is another way to conceptualize and understand the connection between eyes blinking and speech - in the frame of ideomotor movements that express unconscious meanings. Metaphorically, we can compare eyes blinking and automatic writing.

Automatic and unconsciously coordinated ideomotor movements of a person in somnambulistic trance express some meanings directly in writing words. If that process is shortened, we still can see some ideomotor movements of a hand and those movements still express some unconscious ideas. But those ideas don't turn into letters or other written signs. So sometimes Dr. Erickson used those hand movements and some marks on paper as signs for "yes" and "no". The other use of the same method is when a person is in a somnambulistic trance and points some words in a written text automatically without conscious control. Blinking is not controlled by consciousness so it is similar to the

ideomotor movements of hand in automatic writing.

Therapeutic Use

Eyes blinking as a natural ideomotor reaction can be used in therapy for finding and noticing ideas, meaning and thoughts in the patient's speech. Therapist needs those ideas, meaning and thoughts for responding to the patient in the most adequate way: the patient will willingly agree with those ideas that keep connected his unconscious mind and his conscious mind. That connection is very special for the patient. "You always use the patient's own words and experience as much as possible for trance induction and suggestion" (2, p. 29). So if the therapist will build his response to the patient on the basis of the ideas that the patient pointed by blinking the therapist will get an easy and quick rapport with the patient's consciousness and unconsciousness. Then this rapport can be utilized in official hypnotic procedure. And even without official trance induction if for a long time the therapist will continue the therapeutic dialog with the use of the words that the patient had pointed by eyes blinking and other expression, in result the patient's state of consciousness will be changed. The patient will demonstrate the interchange of awaking state and fast trances.

The therapist can also use the words that were pointed only by blinking. The use of those words will enhance the rapport with the patient's unconsciousness. In this case the communication itself will lead to trance state or even spontaneous somnambulistic trance.

It is interesting to analyze the patient's eyes blinking when he is listening to the therapist. We don't suppose that it is a similar process because while listening the blinking can refer to some internal significant mental processes. But if the non-verbal rapport is constant and stable (especially if the therapist has been blinking in rapport with the patient but then stopped blinking) it is very likely that during the therapist's speech the patient will point the most significant therapist's words for his unconsciousness. In this case the patient's unconscious understanding turns into conscious understanding quite easily.

1.2. Single Blinking That Takes Place Between Two Particular Words

It is a different unconscious process when a single blinking takes place between two particular words. In order to find out the meaning of that

process we addressed to the subjects with the questions like the following: "What else could you say? What was missed? Is there any other meaning in your words?" Many instances of such dialogs confirmed us that there are two typical explanations:

- a. there can be a deliberate concealment of information that is marked by several non-verbal signals;
- b. There can be the very early stage of turning some unconscious understanding into conscious level, it requires more steps for this transition, so that is a deeper level, far from conscious understanding.

In case of such a "concealing" blinking would be a good therapeutic decision to ask a patient to express this meaning in some other way, to add something or just to continue talking. Or the therapist can use some special non-verbal signal every time when the patient demonstrates the "concealing" blinking and establish a link between the signal and the blinking. This signal then can be used during the trance work. Such trances are very appropriate when it is needed to bring some information into conscious level of understanding. Such trances rarely, if ever, are followed by amnesia. We have noticed that the understanding developed from such trances doesn't press the patient. It can reveal at a right moment as a soft insight, maybe, through night dreams. If there is a dramatic experience to be resolved the dreams are also positive and soft and the symbols are easily interpreted. Sometimes there are no symbols but just pure information.

2. Multiple Eyes Blinking

We have noticed that multiple blinking while the patient is speaking points some special meaning that can't be expressed fully in the said words. Usually, it is multi dimensioned and overwhelming meaning, accompanied by intense emotional affect. Such multiple blinking can also happen when the therapist is talking and the patient hears something of great importance, something very significant. Perhaps, if the patient is blinking so fast that means that the therapist has touched the very deep problem - the unconscious representation of the problem.

3. Diversity of Eyes Blinking Reaction

3.1. Sometimes we notice that the patient blinks very fast. We understand that as a sign of a mental or emotional overwhelmed state. It can be a strong repressed or noticeable frightened reaction or some other negative emotion. Fast blinking is also typical

for the persons that have rather complicated mental processes or are involved in abstract thinking. In this case the fast blinking shows a high level of psychic involvement in those mental processes. It means that there is an intensive process of turning the unconscious processes into the conscious form.

3.2. Analyzing the blinking reaction this way we can be sure that if the person doesn't blink for a long time that means that he is in an altered state of consciousness and his conscious understanding is similar to his unconscious understanding. Or it may be a trance state with open eyes. However, the subject in somnambulistic state of consciousness may start blinking if his mental processes are activated and if some understandings and ideas are forming for the following conscious understanding.

4. Criticism

Analyzing and doing therapy with the use of the blinking reaction the author reminds himself critically: people are blinking involuntarily in order to protect their eyes. But the reply is: people can blink very seldom if such is a habit or if they are trained this way (for some purposes). Even when blinking very seldom, people don't feel any discomfort. The author, definitely, realizes that a strong wind or some mote will make a person to blink faster without any emotional reasons. In this case blinking means only the biological protection. The author

believes that he has studied the influence of high psychological informational processes upon archaic biological processes. The author doesn't know how he should understand the fact that his cat blinks very seldom but starts blinking fast when hearing the word "meat". The easiest explanation is that the author has unconsciously established that reaction just for fun.

5. Some Other Interesting Considerations

The author considers being interesting to investigate the regularities of eyelid movements of a sleeping person (3). It is also interesting to investigate the connection between unconscious processes and asymmetrical eye blinking. While watching slow videotape it is easy to notice that sometimes one lid is moving earlier than the other is. Dr. Erickson mentioned that according to some researches asymmetrical eye blinking is a sign of some neuropathology. The author believes that the reality is more complex. The video watching proves that such a phenomenon is a dynamic one. Some people do have constant eye blinking asymmetry. But more often during a short period of time a person can demonstrate symmetrical blinking at some points of talking and asymmetrical blinking at some other points of talking. That leads to the conclusion that blinking asymmetry also may be connected to unconscious processes.

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