



Clear Thinking Issue 118

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In this issue:

- How to stop worrying yourself to death
- Precision Hypnosis online training course

How well do you know yourself?

Hypnosis Master Series: Why worrying is self hypnotic and what to do about it
– by **Mark Tyrrell**

Palaeontologists and other historians suggest that the seeds of civilisation could only really begin to sprout once human beings had developed imagination. The earliest cave paintings are thought to be about 40,000 years old. That's round about when things took off in spectacular fashion as human beings discovered how to make and use highly refined tools and began to consciously change the world around them – leading into the development of what we call civilisation.

How exactly did imagination help this process?

Well, imagination is, in part, the capacity to envisage things that aren't there in the 'here and now'. The imaginative faculty enables us to escape where we are and what we are doing. Imagination helps us create in our minds an alternative reality, so it frees us to

plan and invent. To invent a weapon, or a farming implement, or a medicine, or anything at all, we first have to *imagine* that it is possible to do so.

40,000 years is a rather short time ago, palaeontologically speaking, so imagination is a relatively new phenomenon on Planet Earth. Some other animal species also appear to have imaginative faculties, but on nothing like the same scale as humans. Imagination helps us build empires, write books, invent technologies and develop, learn and speak languages. It is what enables us to access the state of hypnosis and develop new motivations and influence the workings of the body. Imagination is perhaps our finest psychological tool.

But, like *any* tool, it can be misused. It's this *misuse* of the imagination that I'm talking about now.

I must state clearly that even worrying has its place. If someone you've never met before suggests you invest all your life savings in their fail-safe scheme, then you really should worry. If your friend downs three bottles of wine and then insists they are sober enough to drive, then you really should worry. In both these instances your imagination should kick in full blast and you should create mental scenarios of what could go wrong. You might picture yourself losing your savings, or your friend crashing in a drunken stupor. And, hopefully, you will then take appropriate evasive action. To this extent, worrying is useful, and even essential. But some people so overuse this element of imagination that they drain themselves and others of energy, enjoyment and positive focus.

Our word 'worry' comes from an old English word meaning 'to strangle'. Hunting dogs would 'worry' their prey to death. The problem with chronic worrying is that, instead of being an aid to avoiding what's worth avoiding – like rash investments or drunk driving – it becomes a barrier, *preventing* us from doing things that really would be worth doing. A worrier might not go to a party because they worry how they come across; they might not go for a job promotion because worry prevents them even trying; they might spoil their relationships by over analysing them. Like any potentially useful tool, worry needs to be used *sometimes* - but not as if it's the *only* tool in the world.

Worrying has other worrying consequences. Your imagination directly affects not only your psychology – how you think and feel – but also your *physiology*. Imagine your favourite food and your mouth will water. That's an example of how your imagination can immediately affect your salivary glands. People can imagine in hypnosis what it would be like if their arm was encased in ice and the ensuing feeling of numbness can be pervasive enough for them to undergo an operation without anaesthetic. We can imagine being in a beautiful place and our breathing may slow down, our blood pressure

may decrease and our muscles relax. All well and good. Your imagination has hypnotic effects on your mind and body.

Where else do we find the imagination affecting psychology, motivation and physiology? I just answered my own question – worrying, of course!

Worrying has consequences not just in lost opportunities and wasted time but on a physical level.

Worrying wouldn't be so bad if it always led to positive solutions. In fact, that, in a way, is what problem solving is. We examine the problem; we imagine consequences of different actions; we devise a plan; and we carry out the plan. Result. But people who chronically worry *will they like me? will I make a fool of myself? will I end up sad and lonely? will people think I'm stupid at the interview?...* and so on... are caught in a two-pronged trap.

Firstly, they are worrying about the kind of things that cannot be 'solved' in the immediate sense. For example, we can *influence*, but not completely control, whether people like us or not. Ultimately, what someone thinks about you may have more to do with them than you. What worriers need to learn to do is *relax with uncertainty*. If I'm going to give a speech to a hundred people, I can't be certain they will all like me, but I can relax with not knowing and, as long as I do a reasonable job, not care *too* much.

Secondly, people who worry too much experience a kind of hypnotic paralysis. Instead of worries leading to solutions, they *just* worry. They don't actually plan and act to *solve* the worry.

Worriers hypnotize themselves into feeling what they imagine *could* happen *definitely will* happen. Self hypnosis is an effective tool to increase certainty – which is why self hypnosis for confidence is so powerful and effective. And using self hypnosis to scare themselves about the future will have a powerful but negative effect on what they experience and how they act in the gloomy future they've imagined.

To stop misusing imagination to hypnotize ourselves with worry, we can

- *Examine the worries and see if we can actually solve them.*
For example, if I worry I'm getting too fat – I can either *just* fret about it or I can *use that worrying* to generate motivation to get me eating and exercising better – so I'm now actively problem solving the worry.

- *Challenge the worry.*

If I'm worried that no one will like me at a party, I can challenge that idea. How realistic is my fear? By the law of averages *some* people will like me, a few may not, some will be indifferent *or* the party spirit may make everyone well disposed toward everyone! Now I've presented a few alternative possibilities to myself that aren't negative. This is something worriers often forget to do.

- *Change how we feel about the worry.*

If I'm worried that my house is a bit scruffy, I can solve that worry, and switch it off, by decorating. But if my worries are more vague and not something that can be tackled directly in the here and now, it's more helpful to *change how I feel about the situation*. Perhaps I worry that I upset someone years ago, someone I no longer see and so it's harder to practically solve that worry. 'Trying not to think about it', as we all know, doesn't work. It's much more useful to practise *thinking about it while feeling okay*. That does work. I have used this approach with hypochondriacs (who have, I hasten to add, been given the medical all clear). I teach them to relax, then ask them to still imagine they might have an illness *while feeling relaxed*. Relaxing while having worrying thoughts completely changes the effect those thoughts have on you.

Since worrying is essentially self-hypnotic, we can gently turn it into a different type of more positive self hypnosis.

Worry is stimulating. It raises blood pressure and fills your system with adrenaline and the stress hormone cortisol. This happens because worrying signals that there is a threat out there (a real one, not just something we dreamed up). So our bodies get pumped up to run or fight. This is why worrying will stop you sleeping.

If you find yourself worrying about stuff that can't be immediately solved for real, then get creative.

Take those worries and start to *strongly imagine* that they have been solved (by whatever magical means). Remember, the worry itself is fantasy too. Even if you feel it's very likely to happen, it's still all imaginary while you are actually worrying. So the more outlandish the solution you dream up, the better – this is fantasy. It doesn't matter how you solve that worry in your mind – a lottery win, a crazy business idea that worked, a fairy godmother – any creative ideas at all. This will have two effects:

- It will switch your mind from 'hunting' to 'captured' mode. If you really imagine *having solved* a problem, your mind gets the message that it can shut down again, switch off all that unnecessary arousal and stress in the body and get relaxed and calm.
- It may well actually provide you with possible *genuine solutions* to real problems – because of 'out of the box' thinking.

A client of mine had a recurring worry that she needed more money than she was bringing in each month to survive. She started to change the worry from pure negative rumination to miraculous solution. One night, she imagined digging up treasure from the bottom of her garden. She fantasized about this solution and felt more relaxed and went to sleep. Almost as soon as she awoke the next day it occurred to her that she could start growing her own food. She had a few fruit trees, and a patch of ground beside them suitable for vegetables. Even at her small scale, she noticed her food bills go down, and some money even came in when she sold her apples. Her fantasy solution had helped to produce a real one.

So some of the key ideas here are:

- Worrying is a tool that has its uses but when overused produces depression, hopelessness and undue anxiety.
- Worrying is self hypnotic in that it uses (or rather, *mis-uses*) the imagination to produce psychological, physical and behavioural changes in people.
- Overcoming worrying is not just about trying to *think* differently but focusing on *feeling* differently and letting the thoughts fall in line around the changed feelings.

I hope you have found these ideas about worry interesting and useful.

Precision Hypnosis online training course

Please don't worry too much! New dates for our [Precision Hypnosis online training course](#) will be announced soon! This advanced online training course is for people who are already comfortable with the basics of using hypnosis to help themselves and others creatively address all kinds of psychological and emotional difficulties.

The Precision Hypnosis course allows you, from the comfort of your own home, to take your hypnotic skills to a much higher level. Numbers are strictly limited to ensure that all participants get maximum benefit from the intensive interactive tuition sessions and discussions.

Look out for the new dates for the Precision Hypnosis online training course and book early to take advantage of our early bird discount (25% off!).

Meanwhile, you can read more about the Precision Hypnosis online training course [here](#).

See you in a fortnight.

Mark Tyrrell

Co-Founder

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