

IDEOMOTOR RESPONSES IN FORENSIC PRACTICE

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Ideomotor types of behavior are basically involuntary muscular movements. These responses have been interpreted in various ways. The following is a brief overview of some of the major theories associated with ideomotor responses, and some ideas worthy of your consideration when using this procedure as a memory search technique in the forensic setting. Close to a century ago Bernheim discussed the theory of a psychophysiological process (ideomotor action) being a factor in his theorizing about the hypnotic process (Weitzenhoffer, 1989). He apparently was influenced by two British physicians named Laycock and Carpenter. More recently, the father of American Psychology, William James, stated that ideomotor actions played a significant role in human behavior (James, 1890). The well known learning theorist Clark Hull also experimented with hypnosis and implied the importance of ideomotor action in his theory of hypnosis (Hull, 1933). About the same time, Milton Erickson was also using ideodynamic signaling in his medical practice. Ideomotor responses were referred to as organ language by Frank Monaghan. He felt that it was one example of organ language and organ language is the language of the unconscious (Monaghan, 1972). Rossi prefers the term ideodynamic while Cheek likes to use ideomotor to describe this phenomena. Cheek believes that there are physiological and skeletal (ideomotor) components to memory and that these behaviors are less subject to voluntary misrepresentations (Rossi & Cheek, 1988). His position is not unlike the notion of a muscle memory that some martial arts and physical exercise specialists espouse. They believe that continued practice will result in an almost involuntary and flawless performance even under stress.

The oldest known device for demonstrating ideomotor behavior involved a contemporary of Bernheim, a chemist named Chevreul, and the use of a pendulum that still bears his name. The past popularity of the Ouija Board is perceived by some as attesting to the value of ideomotor behavior. As a matter of fact, no devices are needed to demonstrate ideomotor responses

aside from the establishment of predetermined hand signals. While Chevreul's pendulum can be used in the forensic setting, the use of finger/hand signals is preferable. Forensic matters must be audio and/or video taped, with videotaping being preferable, especially when using ideomotor finger signals for recalling information which will be used as investigative leads and in all probability will be subject to judicial review. The playing of a video showing a pendulum signing from a chain may open the procedure to criticism and questioning by the opposition. A simpler, more straightforward reason is that no equipment is needed when the subject's fingers are employed and for many this may feel more natural than grasping a chain or string.

Pre-induction programming involves the establishment of ideomotor finger signals. There are four possible signals: "Yes", "No", "I Don't Know", and "I Don't Want to Answer." You may wish to eliminate the "I Don't Know" and only use the "I Don't Want to Answer." This may eliminate some confusion between the semantics of no and know. Cheek appears to have been the first one to suggest that "know" and "no" may be confusing to the subject/patient. He recommends establishing "Yes", "No", and "I Do Not Want to Answer" signals as he feels this approach is less confusing.

Whatever your decision, establish clear signal instructions before commencing. The attached forms (Refer to Exhibits #1 and #2) may be used to identify the designation of specific fingers and ensure a sequential order of questioning, especially with the ideomotor recalling of license plate information. One method is to touch the index finger of the preferred hand. While some recommend the dominant hand, I have found that it is best to ask the subject which hand he/she prefers to use. When the index finger is touched, you tell them that it will automatically lift up. The subject is then told that their index finger will rise up, automatically, each time the answer to any question is "Yes." Conditioning may be enhanced by touching the index finger and simultaneously saying "yes" several times. The selection of the "No" finger is next. I recommend using the little finger on the same hand. Some use the middle finger of the same hand while others use a finger from the opposite hand. Similar procedures are used to establish a finger lift to signify a "No" response. Finally, the "I Don't Want to Answer" response is established. I use the thumb of the designated hand for this response. The "I Don't Want to Answer" response can be explained to the subject as a way to signal when they are confused, do not immediately know the answer, or are unwilling to answer,

for some reason, at this time. This same procedure may be repeated while the subject is under hypnosis if desired.

Once the ideomotor finger signals are established, the subject is hypnotized and the process is begun. If a license plate number is desired, you may elicit a “Yes” or “No” finger signal for the first six questions on Exhibit #1 when the person being interviewed has been unable to provide that information prior to hypnosis. In this manner you may establish the name of the state and the total number of letters and numbers on the license plate. By using Exhibit #2 you can ask specific questions starting with the first character. Once you have determined that it is a number or letter, you can proceed down the appropriate column until an ideomotor finger signal indicates which number or letter. Once a number or letter has been indicated, you should continue to the end of the column as a cross check to eliminate the other numbers or letters. Should the person indicate a “Yes” signal twice while continuing down the column, you should make a note of both. These combinations can also be processed as one of the possible combinations which may yield the desired vehicle identification.

Ideomotor behavior is viewed by many experts as being more reliable than verbal reports. This is predicated upon the belief that unconscious motor movements act outside voluntary information that may not be available through traditional hypnotic procedures. Therefore, ideomotor procedures are a useful tool in the forensic hypnosis arena.

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