

### HYPNOSIS NEWS # 3

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By Janice Morse

#### Hypnosis provides valuable police tool

Instead of being a crime-scene investigator, he's a mind-scene investigator.

William C. Wester II is a nationally recognized psychologist who uses hypnotism to help victims and witnesses vividly recount what they saw, heard, felt or smelled during a crime.

#### IN DEPTH

Hypnosis expert: Courts don't understand its use

The public misunderstands hypnosis. Ditto for the courts, an expert says.

"Virtually every court has misunderstood the issue of hypnosis, and therefore dealt with it incorrectly," says Alan Schefflin, a professor of law at Santa Clara University and author of *Trance on Trial* (Gilford Press, 1987).

Many courts prohibit a person from testifying about information that arose during hypnosis.

The courts, he says, are acting upon the mistaken belief that people's memories will automatically "confabulate," or generate false memories under hypnosis. But memory often does that without hypnosis, he points out.

Federal courts and about a third of the state courts, including those in Ohio, allow testimony of hypnotized people on a case-by-case basis.

Hypnosis doesn't guarantee truth, says Mr. Schefflin, who is affiliated with the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis. "But to say that it's a guarantee of falsity is wrong and foolish."

"Hypnosis is not magic," says Dr. Wester, 62, of Mount Washington. "It doesn't always lead to an arrest. But it almost always generates some additional investigative leads for the police to follow."

As a forensic hypnosis consultant, Dr. Wester practices a specialty that is uncommon, sometimes controversial and often misunderstood.

Even so, during the past 11 years, Dr. Wester and a Cleveland-area sketch artist, John W. Kilnapp, have quietly gained respect for their teamwork on about 50 robberies, rapes, kidnappings and killings nationwide.

David Roth, a detective sergeant in Collinsville, Ill., heard about the pair in 1998 and enlisted them to jump-start the stalled investigation of “the South Side rapist,” Dozens of women in the St. Louis area were attacked.

Dr. Wester hypnotized a witness and, as she described the man, Mr. Kilnapp produced a composite. More “lifelike” than previous ones, the sketch generated hundreds of new leads, said Detective Sgt. Roth.

“Within six months after their composite was done, this guy was identified and in custody — after we'd been searching for him for 10 years,” he said.

Dr. Wester says many law-enforcement professionals aren't aware of the ways his specialty can assist them.

Dr. Wester and Mr. Kilnapp emphasize they don't solve crimes; police do. But the artist and psychologist estimate that, in 95 percent of their cases, they have helped expand a short description to fill several pages for investigators to pursue.

The pair met in 1991. Mr. Kilnapp — a special agent and forensic artist with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms — was attending training that Dr. Wester was conducting at the FBI Academy in Quantico, Va.

Mr. Kilnapp says there's a big difference between Dr. Wester and a TV “hypnotist” who persuades audience members to do stunts: “He doesn't do this for entertainment.”

The American Society of Clinical Hypnosis has certified about 900 psychologists — only five of whom, including Dr. Wester, list forensic hypnosis as a specialty.

Hypnotism is an age-old art and science, Dr. Wester says.

It induces relaxation so deep that the person's mind blocks out all distractions and “travels” to an earlier time and place. Thus, the person may be able to unlock detail-rich descriptions, such as license plate numbers.

Dr. Wester acts as a tour guide through the person's memory; his steady, mellow voice provides a reassuring presence.

Dr. Wester acknowledges the potential for misuse of hypnosis — and doesn't hesitate to expose it.

In fact, Dr. Wester discredited the sex-abuse allegations against Cardinal Joseph

Bernardin in 1994. A framed newspaper article about the Cincinnati case hangs on Dr. Wester's office wall at the Athenaeum of Ohio, where he directs the master of arts degree program in pastoral counseling.

Former Cincinnati seminary student Steven Cook alleged then-Bishop Bernardin had molested him 17 years earlier.

But Dr. Wester had hypnotized Mr. Cook previously, and no sex-abuse accusations had surfaced. Dr. Wester questioned the methods and qualifications of a Pennsylvania therapist who had hypnotized Mr. Cook, causing the allegations to surface. Mr. Cook backed off.

Qualified practitioners employ safeguards against inaccuracies, Dr. Wester said, including videotaping sessions, carefully wording questions and following a script to avoid influencing the witness.

Mr. Kilnapp has seen hypnotically extracted information substantiated time and again, and he doesn't see anything mystifying about the process.

Eliciting an accurate description of a suspect requires "getting inside your head" — and Dr. Wester opens the door, Mr. Kilnapp says.

"Hopefully he can walk the person through the door, into that one hour of their life," he says. "Your whole life is a movie. All we're asking you to do is hit 'pause,' then rewind."

As the session progresses, Mr. Kilnapp allows the witness to see his rendering of the suspect and to suggest any refinements.

In the South Side rapist case, "this woman's face went blood red ... she started crying and shaking," Mr. Kilnapp says. "You could see the fear and the pain in her face."

Dr. Wester tells witnesses to envision a place where they feel safe and to "return" there if they feel too uncomfortable.

He ends the session, which can last from 30 minutes to several hours, with a "post-hypnotic suggestion," telling the subject to contact investigators if more details surface.

"We've had them run back from the parking lot, saying, 'I just remembered something else,'" Dr. Wester says.

Dr. Wester estimates he has helped police on 150 cases — about 100 without Mr. Kilnapp. Few of them have been publicized; his role is often behind-the-scenes.

He first used hypnosis to aid a criminal investigation in the late 1960s.

During a phone conversation, one teacher told a colleague that a mechanic had arrived at her house. The teacher was later found stabbed to death.

At a Cincinnati detective's request, Dr. Wester put the "phone witness" under hypnosis. The witness repeated the victim's words, including the mechanic's name. Detectives went to the man's house and found bloody clothes; he was arrested and convicted, Dr. Wester says.

"It's tremendously rewarding," he says.

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