

Mass Kidnap Case Aided By Hypnosis

By Karen Feld

Special to The Washington Star

In the largest mass kidnaping ever to occur in the United States, the alleged abductors were identified and apprehended through the FBI's use of hypnosis.

Dr. William S. Kroger, a Los Angeles psychiatrist and hypnotherapist, who is now acting as consultant to the FBI in other criminal cases, was sent to Chowchilla, Calif., last July after 31 children were kidnaped from a school bus.

Kroger met with Frank Edward Ray, the driver of the bus, and taught him how to use self-hypnosis, a method of inducing a relaxed state. "Self-hypnosis made him able to think more clearly. He wanted to cooperate with the authorities."

"RAY HAD CAUGHT a glimpse of the license number of the van (in which the children were kidnaped) but couldn't remember it," Kroger said. "He told us he saw the van moving away. We told him he was looking at a TV screen and he could see a video playback of the entire situation; he could see the van moving away.

"I'm now bringing in a zoom lens to bring the license plate closer to him. Now everything is slowing down in time. The van is hardly moving; the letters are getting as big as the screen — the television screen, the motion picture screen. You're looking at the license numbers now. Tell me what they are.

"Coming right out of the fog, he revealed the license numbers which led to the capture of three kidnaping suspects.

Hypnosis has been used in medicine and to improve concentration in sports and acting for many years. In fact, Kroger says, "hypnosis probably began when man first crawled out of the primeval mud. All religion is based on hypnosis. It is the influencing of one individual by another through suggestion," explains Kroger, one of the innovators in the field of medical hypnosis.

KROGER, NOW 76, began working in hypnosis in 1925 at Northwestern University and developed an interest in the use of hypnosis in criminology to restore amnesia victims.

"The brain stores everything and forgets nothing. Through hypnosis an individual is able to think better, and therefore remember better," says Kroger.

Despite popular misconceptions, hypnosis is not a trance, not a state of unconsciousness. "It's the nth degree of suggestion," says Kroger. "It produces relaxation and gets rid of competing impulses. An individual performs better in an anxiety-free environment.

The FBI this year instituted an experimental program which employs hypnosis in selective cases in helping victims and witnesses of crimes to recall facts and identify criminals. Bob Gebhardt, assistant director in charge of the FBI Los Angeles office, and Dick Douce, a special agent, began a feasibility study using investigative hypnosis in January, 1976. They contacted Kroger after publication of a book he wrote with W.D. Feltzer titled "Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis and Behavior Modification: Imagery Conditioning."

The study was approved by the U.S. attorney general and FBI Director Clarence Kelly and is being conducted on the West Coast. Dr. Kroger is the only medical hypnotist working with them to date.

HYPNOSIS IS USED primarily to jog the memories of witnesses, enhance recall and to get more accurate descriptions which can be used in composite pictures for police artists, such as in the DeGetta case. In that one, a woman asked another woman in the Kaiser Clinic reception room in Los Angeles to hold her baby while she went shopping. When the mother returned, both the strange woman and baby were gone. Under hypnosis, the mother gave a description which proved to be an exact likeness of the abductor and led to her capture.

There have been some failures in the use of hypnosis in criminology. Kroger says, "We had a banker's wife who was kidnaped and she got a good look at the guy who taped and gagged her. But the incident was so painful for her that even under hypnosis she blocked it out."

After almost a year experimental program, Douce says he is encouraged by the results. "It is a good technique to employ in selective cases. We don't hypnotise suspects, only witnesses and victims who want to cooperate. We never use it to obtain confessions."