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Touching a Nerve: Can Hypnosis Alleviate Dental Anxiety?
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The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between hypnotizability and dental anxiety, and if hypnosis can attenuate that relationship. Participants (n = 291) were administered a group measure of hypnotizability, (the Harvard Group Scale of Hypnotic Susceptibility), the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory and a demographics questionnaire. Participants were randomly assigned to either a hypnosis or no hypnosis condition and a sound or no sound condition. Participants in the hypnosis group were administered a brief hypnosis technique. Participants in the no-hypnosis group were told to take a ten minute break and walk around. Participants then viewed a brief video of a dental procedure, either with the sound of the drill or no sound, and then completed a dental anxiety questionnaire and a dental history questionnaire. Results indicated a significant positive relationship between trait anxiety and dental anxiety and between numbers of dental procedures experienced in the past and dental anxiety. There were no between-group differences for either the hypnosis or sound conditions. Results suggest that persons who are predisposed to anxiety as a character trait may be more sensitive to the effects of experience with dental procedures, and that persons who are experiencing transient situational anxiety may not be as easily affected by going to the dentist.