



# What if...



You are a  
hypnotist...



And don't know it?



A Presentation by

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# The Power of Suggestion

## Placebos

*Placebo* is Latin for “I will please.” Placebos, typically sugar pills without “active ingredients,” outperform “real” antacids. A 1994 series of articles in *The Lancet* explored the pervasiveness of the placebo effect, which is a response to the **belief** that something will help. The conclusion was that the placebo effect accounted for approximately 46 percent of the efficacy of “real” pharmaceuticals.

## Nocebos

*Nocebo* is Latin for “I will harm.” “White-coat syndrome is the best-known example of the nocebo effect, which is based on the *fear* that the physician or nurse will find something “wrong.” Medical personnel may inadvertently install a fear: “You have 6 months to live.” “You will never walk again.” Such comments have just as much effect as the placebo effect, only in an unintended direction.



# The Power of Authority



## Influence

White-coat syndrome extends beyond the medical profession. Anyone in authority has the ability to influence others for good or ill with the power of words and the aura of “belief” conveyed by authority. Parents, teachers, and “experts” of all varieties have the ability to influence the beliefs of those who recognize their authority and often create the placebo or nocebo effect unintentionally.



## Authority

A young man entered therapy because, at 30, he had been unable to hold a job or establish a romantic relationship. The source of his difficulty turned out to be his memory of his father having said, “Oh no, your nose is broken, and your life is ruined,” following an accident when he was 9 years old. Another young man entered therapy to discover why he was unable to read or write. Under hypnosis, he remembered a teacher having scolded him for goofing off by snapping a pencil in front of his face and saying, “You’ll never learn anything in school.”



# Hypnosis Isn't the Exception... It's the Rule

## Trances

We like to think that we are conscious and rational, but most behavior is driven by thoughts and feelings outside conscious awareness—the *unconscious*. Habits and other routine behaviors demonstrate that we engage in many behaviors without really “thinking” about them. Shaking hands when meeting someone is a common example. We don’t think about it—we just do it.

## Responses

It is not so much *whether* we are in a trance as it is a matter of *which trance* we are in. In broad terms, trances in response to authority can be **compliance** or **defiance**. One person told that he or she will never walk again internalizes the physician’s hypnotic command, while another responds by saying, “Oh, yeah! Just watch me.”



# Hypnosis Is the Rule

“We spend our lives telling ourselves the story of the past and future, while the reality of the present goes largely unexplored.”

[Sam Harris, *The End of Faith*, p. 219.]





# Fun with Priming



## Nonconscious Influence

**Priming** is a form of influence that operates outside of conscious awareness. John Bargh of Harvard University discussed the concept of priming in “What have we been priming for all these years? On the Development, Mechanisms, and Ecology of Nonconscious Social Behavior.” [European Journal of Social Psychology, Agenda 2006]



## Effects of Priming

In *Blink: The Power of Thinking without Thinking*, Malcolm Gladwell reports on two experiments with priming, which showed that college students primed for “old age” walked more slowly than they had previously. Students primed for rudeness behaved more rudely than those primed for courtesy. Our behavior is “primed” by our expectations, which are influenced by what we hear and read.



# What We *Don't* Know

According to [John] Bargh, a goal of social psychology should be to make people aware of these nonintuitive, scientifically discovered unconscious factors that affect thought and behavior. But he admits that this is an uphill battle: Inasmuch as people check such a proposition against their own phenomenal experience to test its validity, we will never be persuasive, because one can never have any phenomenal experience of perception without awareness.

[Joseph LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain: The Emotional Underpinnings of Emotional Life*, p. 63]



# What We *Do* Know...

The distinction between *explicit* memory and *implicit* memory is dramatically illustrated by [an experiment showing] that amnesiacs could be made to either succeed or fail a memory test, simply by changing the instructions.... [T]he brain system that mediates priming is different from the systems involved in skill learning or classical conditioning.

[Joseph LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain: The Emotional Underpinnings of Emotional Life*, p. 197, italics ours.]



# Brain Systems



## Implicit Systems

The brain systems that control automatic, unconscious responses are mediated by the *amygdala*, which is fully formed and operational at birth. Its principal function is to keep us safe by recognizing and responding to danger in the environment. For this reason, it has more projections connecting it to the cortex than the cortex has to it. If emotion and reason disagree, emotion usually “wins.” Learning is implicit and often unconscious.



## Explicit Systems

The *hippocampus* is the part of the cortex that puts experiences in context of time and space and makes explicit, conscious learning possible. Explicit brain systems influence implicit systems by learning. We can learn enough about snakes, for example, that we no longer fear them by convincing the implicit brain systems that, with proper cautions, we have nothing to fear. When our implicit system *believes* that, behavior change occurs.



# Belief and Hypnosis

**Beliefs Rule**

Because implicit systems have greater influence on behavior than explicit systems, we “get” what we believe rather than what we know. We may *know* that we have nothing to fear from snakes, but if, below our level of conscious awareness, we *believe* that snakes are dangerous, we will respond to snakes based on the belief rather than on what we know. This is the reason that affirmations don’t work for many people.

**Which Trance  
Are You In?**

If we are overweight and repeat explicit affirmations that we are our ideal weight, our implicit brain systems reject the affirmations. Implicit brain systems respond to explicit instructions only when they “believe” them to be true. We can affirm that we are *in the process of attaining* our ideal weight or that we *intend* to lose weight. Believable statements of intent are a form of self-hypnosis.



# Weighty Matters



## Maid to Order

In an experiment with the cleaning staff of Boston Area hotels, Langer and Crum of Harvard University told half the subjects that cleaning was effective exercise and listed typical cleaning tasks and the calories burned. The other half were interviewed but were told nothing about exercise. The group that thought of cleaning as effective exercise lost weight. The control group did not.



## Why Weight

In *Mindless Eating: Why We Eat More than We Think*, Brian Wansink, described an experiment in which some diners were offered complimentary cabernet sauvignon from California and others were offered complimentary cabernet sauvignon from North Dakota. Which group ate less and left the restaurant earlier? People who ate soup from bowls that were secretly refilled from the bottom ate more than those whose bowls emptied at a normal rate.



# Hypnotic Language

**Language of  
Influence**

Hypnotic language patterns are often called “The Milton Model” because Milton H. Erickson, M.D., developed them in the course of his hypnotherapy practice. Before Erickson would agree to work with clients, he asked them to perform a task that would indicate that they were committed to the therapeutic process. One of his favorite requests was, “Go climb Squaw Peak.” Compliance indicated willingness to change.

**Direct and  
Indirect  
Suggestion**

In the course of his practice as a hypnotherapist, Erickson moved away from direct hypnotic commands to indirect suggestions based primarily on presuppositions and metaphors:

- What can you do about that? [Presupposes that the client can do something.]
- One of the reasons I like using hypnotic language is that it helps me be more successful.... [If you, like me, want to be more successful, you may want to know more about hypnotic language.]



# You: The Hypnotist



## Formal Trance

A hypnotist or hypnotherapist uses formal trance to put a subject or client into an altered state for a specific purpose. The process consists of an induction, the trance itself, resolution, and return to what is usually considered consciousness. The subject or client agrees to enter the trance to overcome conscious resistance to some desired behavioral change, such as losing weight or stopping smoking.



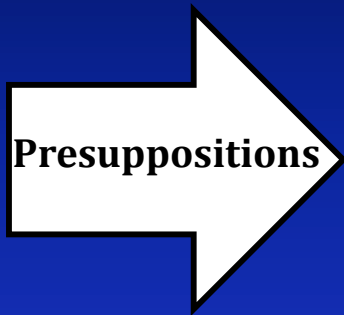
## Informal Trance

Informal trance happens to everyone every day based on language, authority, and conditioning. Most of the time we are unaware that we have been in an altered state: The light changed, and we didn't—until the person behind us honked the horn. Most conversations contain hypnotic language patterns that may influence us beneath our level of conscious awareness unless we know what to listen for.

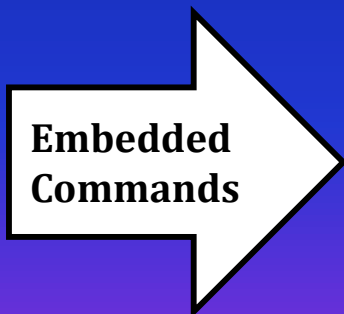




# Hypnotic Language Patterns



Presuppositions set the *frame* for perception and discussion. They may also be used to *reframe* or change a perspective of an issue. The question, “How do you *manage to continue* feeling bad about that,” for example, presupposes that continuing to feel bad requires ongoing, special effort. Do you agree or disagree that it’s good you’re willing to learn more about hypnotic language patterns now that you know something about them.



An *embedded command* is a posthypnotic suggestion embedded in a sentence. The command is typically set off by a change of pace or tonality. When *you want to know more about this technique*, just ask. You can *feel better* in knowing that *you will be able to use these techniques* in your conversations. Hypnotic language patterns allow you to *have fun* while you *learn more* about how language works.



# More Hypnotic Language Patterns



## Tag Questions

A *tag question* is a short question following a statement. When spoken as a question (voice tone up), it usually calls the statement into question: “It’s a nice day today, isn’t it?” The speaker seems to be seeking approval for what he or she just said. When it is delivered as a command (voice tone down), however, it turns the statement into fact: “It’s a nice day today, isn’t it...” Those who might disagree are left uncertain about what to disagree with.



## Metaphors

*Metaphors* presuppose a particular frame. If I say that as you journey through life, you’ll find hypnotic language patterns useful, I have used the metaphor of *Life as a Journey* to presuppose where and how you’ll find hypnotic language useful. Metaphors, especially extended metaphors, are inherently hypnotic. Everyone appreciates a good story or tale, whether told by tribal chiefs around a campfire or by novelists, film-makers, and next door neighbors.



# Even More Hypnotic Language



## “Quotes”

“Quotes” refers to a special application of metaphor in which the metaphor is attributed to someone other than the speaker, usually to increase the authority of the metaphor or to distance the speaker from what is being said. You have probably heard someone say, “As Einstein said...,” which seems to increase the validity of what is being spoken. In training situations, I often quote my Uncle Vince, who, in the context of teaching me to play pool, said, “Power is no substitute for finesse.”



## Ambiguities

You may not have thought of ambiguities as “hypnotic,” but because their appeal is primarily to the unconscious mind, they often influence behavior without the listener’s being aware. One TV commercial instructs you to obtain and take a prescription sleeping pill “for the *rest* [sleep/remainder] of your life.” Those in sales might be inclined to say, “We’re open from 9A to 9P. Come *by* [location/purchase] today....”



## For More Information

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- Heller, S. and Steele, T. (1987). *Monsters and Magical Sticks: There's No Such Thing as Hypnosis*. Tempe, AZ: New Falcon Publications
- Wolinsky, S. (1991). *Trances People Live: Healing Approaches in Quantum Psychology*. Falls Village, CT: The Bramble Company.



## For Even More Information

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