

Features

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Tune Out False Messages and Listen to Your Own Voice

What are subliminal messages? They are words, images or sounds that might appear in television or radio commercials, TV shows or movies, print ads, and recorded music. The message can be hidden (beyond your level of conscious awareness), or seen and heard, but not recognized for what it really is.

Subliminal messages are presented in such a way that they flow in past the conscious mind too quickly to be censored or analyzed, and then continue on to the levels of the brain that we are not aware of (i.e., the unconscious and subconscious mind). There, they stay, directing our behavior without our conscious knowledge.

The idea of these messages has been around since the late 19th century, and by the mid 20th century the use of subliminal messaging in advertising was considered standard fare, especially visual messages where something would flash for a split second on a screen that would subliminally convince the viewer to act in a certain way. People became afraid that subliminal messages could be used to “brainwash” themselves or others. This fear became so great that by the 1970’s, the U.S. Federal Communications Commission banned the use of subliminal messages in advertisements.

Although the use of subliminal messaging through hidden words and images is slowly being banned in most countries, advertisers and politicians continue to utilize single words, concepts, pictures, sounds, aromas, and product placement in stores to direct our behavior. Look at the advertisements for McDonald’s that show groups of people, especially children, laughing, having fun, smiling, and eating a supersized meal. What is the message? If you eat McDonald’s you will have friends, be part of the group, enjoy life!! The lure of McDonald himself is as strong as that of The Marlboro Man in cigarette commercials.

Studies have even shown that just putting a specific number on a sign in a grocery store can encourage people to buy more food. For example, signs that read “2 for \$1.50” instead of “75 cents each”, or “Snickers bars, buy 18 for your freezer”, or “4 per customer”, will stimulate shoppers to buy more than the one or two they ordinarily would.

Another form of “subliminal” advertising that is acceptable to use is the idea of hiding things in plain sight, like the use of product placement in films. If you’re conscious of it, you’ll notice the backdrop of ads, but if you don’t realize they are there, they might be considered a form of subliminal advertising.

Finally, no discussion of subliminal messaging could be complete without discussing the use of images of female bodies to sell everything from food to cars, and to influence how we behave. Women’s magazines are full of articles telling us that if we can just lose those last twenty pounds, we’ll have it all: the perfect marriage, loving children, great sex and a rewarding career. The car show in Chicago always has a beautiful woman alluringly draped over the hood of the car to entice customers to come closer. Media images show female beauty that is unattainable for all but a very small number of women. Images are spliced and diced, altered and touched up to tell us that we are not “good enough” as we are, but we could be “perfect” with this product or this look.

The question we all need to ask is, “If we allow ourselves to be taken over by every external message that is geared toward molding our thinking and behavior, what will we become?” The food industry is trying to get us to eat everything we see in bigger sizes, ignoring the high fat and sugar content and chemical additives. The electronic industry is trying to get us to buy products that increase sedentary, isolated, lonely behavior by encouraging hours of video-game and computer use. And, the beauty industry wants us to buy their products to be slimmer, more beautiful, and better dressed. Not only are all of these end goals contradictory, but the consequences can only be poor quality of life and health.

It’s time to listen to our own voices. To say NO to what everyone else wants us to buy, to be or to feel. Whether it is an advertiser, a politician, a friend or family member doesn’t matter. Decide today to notice these messages, tune them out, and hear your own voice. Be true to who you are, be authentic, and gain much more than those messages can ever offer.

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