

Learn In Your Sleep? The Secret Behind Subliminal mp3s

Pic1.jpg

Within the community of online psychiatry, subliminal mp3s are all the rage, promising anything from increased positivity to the solution for erectile dysfunction and smoking. But just how effective are they?

Pic2.jpg

Subliminal stimuli, or literally "below threshold", is a term covering a wide range of sensory input intended to subconsciously manipulate thoughts and behavior and to illicit specific emotional responses within its intended audience. Though this may sound sinister, it has historically been used since the 5th century B.C. and the vast majority of us are exposed to it on a daily basis via marketing, advertisement and rhetoric. Speech patterns of many of our publicly elected officials are frequently designed to have an almost hypnotic subliminal effect to make us trust them and their campaign slogans.

Pic3.jpg

Even horror films such as *The Exorcist* famously attempted to shock its viewers even subconsciously by inserting single frames of a ghostly face superimposed on scenes. *Fight Club* similarly had "blink and you'll miss it" glimpses of Tyler Durden scattered throughout prior to Brad Pitt's formal introduction.

Subliminal mp3s work similarly, teetering on the edge of conscious perception, just below the volume of consciously audible sound or otherwise masked by other audio, like ocean waves. The most receptive time for the subconscious is said to be during sleep, REM sleep in particular, during which the brain is still partially awake and processing the most potent representation of our subconscious - our dreams. As such, the idea of learning while sleeping, self-improvement while completely oblivious, caught on like wildfire. Unlike other similarly themed therapies of sleep learning however, this one could still technically work during the day as well. Imagine putting on a subliminal slimming mp3 on loop on your iPhone while at work and find yourself much less hungry come lunchtime. Or a pacifying mp3 playing underneath the noise of traffic while you're stuck on the freeway to limit any slightest sensation of road rage you may experience. It sounds grand, doesn't it? Leaving your imperfections for the back of your head to deal with while you press on with more urgent matters, such as making it home to your kid's birthday or meeting the deadline on your blogpost. Your addictions and phobias going away with the push of a play button.

Pic4.jpg

However, there has been debate as to the actual literal effectiveness of content specific subliminal messaging. Much akin to the rules set forth in Hollywood fiction such as *Inception*, the more specific and complex the messaging is, the harder it becomes for our subconscious to process it and follow. Simplicity, it seems, is the key to the subconscious - studies using

functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging show imaging get a considerably higher response than printed words, which are more difficult for the brain to register and interpret, and audio stimuli gets possibly most of all due to the inherent subconscious effect of sound. You would think this mere fact to be a ringing endorsement of subliminal mp3s, but testing remains inconclusive as to the effectiveness of complex messages in audio form.

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Where does that leave the dear reader itching to quit smoking or spice up their love life? That is a much harder question, and one that is still under considerable debate. The complexity with which the brain handles spoken messages is still a major hurdle for any therapist peddling self-help sounds of the beach with a hidden mantra within. Studies have shown that being told not to eat through subliminal means is trumped every time by glamorized images of cheeseburgers and pizza in any of the hundreds of fast-food commercials aired on TV every day. Being told not to smoke is one of few examples with a clear success rate probably in part due to strict limitations on tobacco advertisement and widespread public knowledge of the health concerns connected to smoking. Sexual subliminal stimuli on the other hand has a direct line to the most base urges and evoke an instant reaction in almost anyone sufficiently exposed, but still can't do much if any preexisting cause for the dysfunction remain.

So before shelling out cold hard cash on dubious claims of creating a newer, better you just by popping in a few more seemingly ambient tracks on your playlist, consider first the complexity of what you're asking, and how deeply rooted the issue is. Whereas subliminal messaging may have a decent batting average, talk therapy is in the all-stars hall of fame by comparison.