

# The effectiveness of subliminal mind messaging



Subliminal stimuli, contrary to supraliminal stimuli or “above threshold”, are any sensory stimuli below an individual’s absolute threshold for conscious perception. Visual stimuli may be quickly flashed before an individual may process them, or flashed and then masked, thereby interrupting the processing. Audio stimuli may be played below audible volumes, similarly masked by other stimuli, or recorded backwards in a process called backmasking. Introduced in 1897, the concept became controversial as “subliminal messages” in 1957 when marketing practitioners claimed its potential use in persuasion. Subsequent scientific research, however, has been unable to replicate most of these marketing claims beyond a mere placebo effect.

Used in advertising to create familiarity with new products, subliminal messages make familiarity into a preference for the new products. Johan Karremans suggests that subliminal messages have an effect when the messages are goal-relevant. Karremans did a study assessing whether subliminal priming of a brand name of a drink would affect a person’s choice of drink, and whether this effect is caused by the individual’s feelings of being thirsty.

His study sought to ascertain whether or not subliminally priming or preparing the participant with text or an image without being aware of it would make the partaker more familiar with the product. Half of his participants were subliminally primed with Lipton Ice (“Lipton Ice” was repeatedly flashed on a computer screen for 24 milliseconds), while the other half was primed with a control that did not consist of a brand. In his study he found that subliminally priming a brand name of a drink (Lipton Ice)

made those who were thirsty want the Lipton Ice. Those who were not thirsty, however, were not influenced by the subliminal message since their goal was not to quench their thirst.

Subconscious stimuli by single words are well known to be modestly effective in changing human behaviour or emotions. This is evident by a pictorial advertisement that portrays four different types of rum. The phrase " U Buy" was embedded somewhere, backwards in the picture. A study was done to test the effectiveness of the alcohol ad. Before the study, participants were able to try to identify any hidden message in the ad, none found any. In the end, the study showed 80% of the subjects unconsciously perceived the backward message, meaning they showed a preference for that particular rum.

Though many things can be perceived from subliminal messages, only a few words or a single image of unconscious signals can be internalized. As only a word or image can be effectively perceived, the simpler features of that image or word will cause a change in behaviour (i. e., beef is related to hunger). This was demonstrated by Byrne in 1959. The word " beef" was flashed for several, five millisecond intervals during a sixteen-minute movie to experimental subjects, while nothing was flashed to control subjects. Neither the experimental nor control subjects reported for a higher preference for beef sandwiches when given a list of five different foods, but the experimental subjects did rate themselves as hungrier than the control subjects when given a survey. If the subjects were flashed a whole sentence, the words would not be perceived and no effect would be expected.

In 1983, five studies with 52 undergraduate and graduate students, found that although subliminally flashing and masking the words affects the availability of conscious processing, it however has little effect on visual processing itself. This suggests that perceptual processing is an unconscious activity that proceeds to all levels of available and redescription analysis. For example if flashed the word " butter" the individual would be quicker to identify the word " bread" than an unrelated word such as " bottle".

In 1991, Baldwin and others in two studies questioned whether priming individuals with images flashed for an instant may affect experiences of self. In the first study, images were flashed of the scowling face of their faculty adviser or an approving face of another before graduate students evaluated their own research ideas. In the second study, participants who were Catholic were asked to evaluate themselves after being flashed a disapproving face of the Pope or another unfamiliar face. In both studies the self-ratings were lower after the presentation of a disapproving face with personal significance, however in the second study there was no effect if the disapproving face were unfamiliar.

In 1992, Krosnick and others, in two studies with 162 undergraduates, demonstrated that attitudes can develop without being aware of its antecedents. Individuals viewed nine slides of people performing familiar daily activities after being exposed to either an emotionally positive scene, such as a romantic couple or kittens, or an emotionally negative scene, such as a werewolf or a dead body between each slide. After exposure from which the individuals consciously perceived as a flash of light, the participants gave more positive personality traits to those people whose slides were associated

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with a emotionally positive scene and vice-versa. Despite the statistical difference, the subliminal messages had less of an impact on judgment than the slide's inherent level of physical attractiveness. In order to determine whether these images affect an individual's evaluation of novel stimuli, a study was conducted in 1993 which produced in similar results.

In 1998, Bar and Biederman questioned whether an image flashed briefly would prime an individual's response. An image was flashed for 47 milliseconds and then a mask would interrupt the processing. Following the first presentation only one in seven individuals could identify the image, while after the second presentation, fifteen to twenty minutes later, one in three could identify the image.

Backmasking is a recording technique in which a sound or message is recorded backward onto a track that is meant to be played forward. During the 1970s, media reports raised a series of concerns of its impact on listeners, stating that satanic messages were calling its listeners to commit suicide, murder, abuse drugs, or engage in sex-which were all rising at the time.

In a series of scientific studies, individuals listening to messages played backwards with no accompanying music could discern: the gender of the speaker; whether the message was in English, French, or German; whether the sentence was declarative or a question; and occasionally a word or meaning of a sentence. However when comparing sentence pairs, individuals were more likely to be incorrect than if their response were by pure chance: if the message were spoken by different speakers; whether two sentences

were semantically related; and label beyond pure chance whether a message was positive or negative in nature-suggesting that individual expectations influenced their response. Across a variety of tasks, the studies were unable to find evidence that such messages affected an individual's behaviour, and reasoned that if the individual could not discern the meaning of the message, then the presence of these messages would be more likely due to the listener's expectations than the existence of these messages in them.

## **Effectiveness**

The effectiveness of subliminal messaging has been demonstrated to prime individual responses and stimulate mild emotional activity. Applications, however, often base themselves on the persuasiveness of the message. The near-consensus among research psychologists is that subliminal messages do not produce a powerful, enduring effect on behaviour; and that laboratory research reveals little effect beyond a subtle, fleeting effect on thinking. For example, priming thirsty people with a subliminal word may, for a brief period of time, make a thirst-quenching beverage advertisement more persuasive. Research upon those claims of lasting effects-such as weight loss, smoking cessation, how music in popular culture may corrupt their listeners, how it may facilitate unconscious wishes in psychotherapy, and how market practitioners may exploit their customers-conclude that there is no effect beyond a placebo. In a 1994 study comparing television commercials with the message either supraliminal or subliminal, individuals produced higher ratings with those that were supraliminal. Unexpectedly,

individuals somehow were less likely to remember the subliminal message than if there were no message.

## **Origins**

The director of Yale Psychology laboratory PhD E. W. Scripture published *The New Psychology* in 1897 (The Walter Scott Ltd, London), which described the basic principles of subliminal messages.

In 1900, Knight Dunlap, an American professor of psychology, flashed an “imperceptible shadow” to subjects while showing them a Müller-Lyer illusion containing two lines with pointed arrows at both ends which create an illusion of different lengths. Dunlap claimed that the shadow influenced his subjects subliminally in their judgment of the lengths of the lines.

Although these results were not verified in a scientific study, American psychologist Harry Levi Hollingworth reported in an advertising textbook that such subliminal messages could be used by advertisers.

During World War II, the tachistoscope, an instrument which projects pictures for an extremely brief period, was used to train soldiers to recognize enemy airplanes. Today the tachistoscope is used to increase reading speed or to test sight.

## **1950-1970**

In 1957, market researcher James Vicary claimed that quickly flashing messages on a movie screen, in Fort Lee, New Jersey, had influenced people to purchase more food and drinks. Vicary coined the term subliminal advertising and formed the Subliminal Projection Company based on a six-

week test. Vicary claimed that during the presentation of the movie Picnic he used a tachistoscope to project the words “ Drink Coca-Cola” and “ Hungry? Eat popcorn” for 1/3000 of a second at five-second intervals. Vicary asserted that during the test, sales of popcorn and Coke in that New Jersey theater increased 57. 8% and 18. 1% respectively.

However, in 1962 Vicary admitted to lying about the experiment and falsifying the results, the story itself being a marketing ploy. An identical experiment conducted by Dr. Henry Link showed no increase in cola or popcorn sales. A trip to Fort Lee, where the first experiment was alleged to have taken place, would have shown straight away that the small cinema there couldn't possibly have had 45, 699 visitors through its doors in the space of 6 weeks. This has led people to believe that Vicary actually did not conduct his experiment at all.

However, before Vicary's confession, his claims were promoted in Vance Packard's book *The Hidden Persuaders*, and led to a public out-cry, and too many conspiracy theories of governments and cults using the technique to their advantage. The practice of subliminal advertising was subsequently banned in the United Kingdom and Australia and by American networks and the National Association of Broadcasters in 1958.

But in 1958, Vicary conducted a television test in which he flashed the message “ telephone now” hundreds of times during a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation program, and found no noticeable increase in telephone calls.



## 1970-2000

In 1973, commercials in the United States and Canada for the game Hä«sker DÄ«? flashed the message “ Get it”. During the same year, Wilson Bryan Key’s book Subliminal Seduction claimed that subliminal techniques were widely used in advertising. Public concern was sufficient to cause the FCC to hold hearings in 1974. The hearings resulted in an FCC policy statement stating that subliminal advertising was “ contrary to the public interest” and “ intended to be deceptive”. Subliminal advertising was also banned in Canada following the broadcasting of Hä«sker DÄ«? ads there.

The December 16, 1973 episode of Columbo titled “ Double Exposure”, is based on subliminal messaging: it is used by the murderer, Dr. Bart Keppler, a motivational research specialist, played by Robert Culp, to lure his victim out of his seat during the viewing of a promotional film and by Lt. Columbo to bring Keppler back to the crime scene and incriminate him. Lt. Columbo is shown how subliminal cuts work in a scene mirroring James Vicary’s experiment.

In 1978, Wichita, Kansas TV station KAKE-TV received special permission from the police to place a subliminal message in a report on the BTK Killer (Bind, Torture, Kill) in an effort to get him to turn himself in. The subliminal message included the text “ Now call the chief”, as well as a pair of glasses. The glasses were included because when BTK murdered Nancy Fox, there was a pair of glasses lying upside down on her dresser; police felt that seeing the glasses might stir up remorse in the killer. The attempt was unsuccessful, and police reported no increased volume of calls afterward.

A study conducted by the United Nations concluded that “ the cultural implications of subliminal indoctrination are a major threat to human rights throughout the world.”

Campaigners have suggested subliminal messages appear in music. In 1985, two young men, James Vance and Raymond Belknap, attempted suicide. At the time of the shootings, Belknap died instantly. Vance was severely injured and survived. Their families were convinced it was because of a British rock band, Judas Priest. The families claimed subliminal messages told listeners to “ do it” in the song “ Better by You, Better than Me”. The case was taken to court and the families sought more than US\$6 million in damages. The judge, Jerry Carr Whitehead said that freedom of speech protections would not apply to subliminal messages. He said he was not convinced the hidden messages actually existed on the album, but left the argument to attorneys. The suit was eventually dismissed. In turn, he ruled it probably would not have been perceived without the “ power of suggestion” or the young men would not have done it unless they really intended to.

In 1985, Dr. Joe Stuessy testified to the United States Senate at the Parents Music Resource Center hearings that:

“ The message of a piece of heavy metal music may also be covert or subliminal. Sometimes subaudible tracks are mixed in underneath other, louder tracks. These are heard by the subconscious but not the conscious mind. Sometimes the messages are audible but are backwards, called backmasking. There is disagreement among experts regarding the effectiveness of subliminals. We need more research on that”

Stuessy's written testimony stated that:

" Some messages are presented to the listener backwards. While listening to a normal forward message (usually nonsensical), one is simultaneously being treated to a back-wards message. Some experts believe that while the conscious mind is trying to absorb the forward lyric, the subconscious is working overtime to decipher the backwards message."

A few months after Judas Priest's acquittal, Michael Waller, the son of a Georgia minister, shot himself in the head while supposedly listening to Ozzy Osbourne's song Suicide Solution (despite the fact that the song Suicide Solution was not on the record [Ozzy Osbourne's Speak Of The Devil] found playing in his room when his suicide was discovered). His parents claimed that subliminal messages may have influenced his actions. The judge in that trial granted the summary judgment because the plaintiffs could not show that there was any subliminal material on the record. He noted, however, that if the plaintiffs had shown that subliminal content was present, the messages would not have received protection under the First Amendment because subliminal messages are, in principle, false, misleading or extremely limited in their social value (Waller v. Osbourne 1991). Justice Whitehead's ruling in the Judas Priest trial was cited to support his position.

## **2000-Present**

During the 2000 U. S. presidential campaign, a television ad campaigning for Republican candidate George W. Bush showed words (and parts thereof) scaling from the foreground to the background on a television screen. When the word BUREAUCRATS flashed on the screen, one frame showed only the

last part, RATS. The FCC looked into the matter, but no penalties were ever assessed in the case.

A McDonald's logo appeared for one frame during the Food Network's Iron Chef America series on 2007-01-27, leading to claims that this was an instance of subliminal advertising. The Food Network replied that it was simply a glitch.

On November 7, 2007, Network Ten Australia's broadcast of the ARIA Awards was called out for using subliminal advertising in an exposé by the Media Watch program on the ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation).

In February 2007, it was discovered that 87 Konami slot machines in Ontario (OLG) casinos displayed a brief winning hand image before the game would begin. Government officials worried that the image subliminally persuaded gamblers to continue gambling; the company claimed that the image was a coding error. The machines were removed pending a fix by Konami.

In 2007, to mark the 50th anniversary of James Vicary's original experiment, it was recreated at the International Brand Marketing Conference MARKA 2007. As part of the "Hypnosis, subconscious triggers and branding" presentation 1, 400 delegates watched part of the opening credits of the film Picnic that was used in the original experiment. They were exposed to 30 subliminal cuts over a 90 second period. When asked to choose one of two fictional brands, Delta and Theta, 81% of the delegates picked the brand suggested by the subliminal cuts, Delta. Although, Delta is also a real brand.

In 2010, Ferrari's Formula One cars sported a barcode design that was criticized for subliminally evoking the logo of sponsor company Marlboro, flouting a ban on tobacco advertising. The design was removed in response.

## **Backmasking**

Backmasking (also known as backward masking) is a recording technique in which a sound or message is recorded backward onto a track that is meant to be played forward. Backmasking is a deliberate process, whereas a message found through phonetic reversal may be unintentional.

Backmasking was popularized by The Beatles, who used backward vocals and instrumentation in recording their 1966 album Revolver. Artists have since used backmasking for artistic, comedic, and satiric effect, on both analog and digital recordings. The technique has also been used to censor words or phrases for "clean" releases of songs.

Backmasking has been a controversial topic in the United States since the 1980s, when allegations from Christian groups of its use for satanic purposes were made against prominent rock musicians, leading to record-burning protests and proposed anti-backmasking legislation by state and federal governments. Whether backmasking can be used subliminally to affect listeners is in debate by both sides

## **Subliminal Advertising**

Subliminal advertising, as some call it, is primarily a set of techniques that focus and defocus the viewer's attention and awareness. Doing this has an impact on what the audience will be able to consciously recall about the ad and what it will remember, but not be able to consciously recall.

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In magazines, for example, the advertiser's main problem is that the typical reader gives a full-page ad only a glance in passing. Less than 3 seconds, typically, the time it takes to slowly turn a page and glance at it as it goes by on the way to the next page.

So, in a magazine or newspaper, how can the potential buyer's attention be captured and focused, in the absence of what TV depends on: motion, music and 'natural' sound, and a human voice?

To do this more efficiently, different levels of attention can be "managed" within microseconds of each other so that the most conscious level of perception will partially mask, but will not overwhelm low-level awareness at one or more other levels.

## **Subliminal Marketing**

The use of subliminal marketing is a popular method of enhancing one's life. These messages are hidden in the many form in any music, video or text message. They reach directly the subconscious level of our mind and generally have a positive effect on our attitude, behaviour and thoughts.

These subliminal marketing message are many times present in TV ads, movies and in music. They are so well implanted that they are not perceived by conscious mind, but are only received and deciphered by subconscious mind.

Subliminal messages have now become a means of using in personal development. With the means of using positive statements to the subconscious mind, people have used it for losing weight, quitting bad habit

or improving the overall personality. It gives a positive outlook to the person using it.

You can use these subliminal messages to make your wishes and desire obvious. Many times you think of a goal as impossible, but after going through sessions of subliminal messages these goals seem to be quite probable to achieve. It is a powerful tool of your mind that allows you to do things which you consciously never attempted. It removes the mental block from your mind.

It makes your brain change the way your subconscious mind wants to do it. It takes time to feel the change come through with the help of this medium, but if done properly you will notice the changes coming in your life.

**[http://www. articlesbase.com/self-improvement-articles/subliminal-marketing-2153211. html#ixzz0vA9MCgFI](http://www.articlesbase.com/self-improvement-articles/subliminal-marketing-2153211.html#ixzz0vA9MCgFI)**

Studies have shown that every day, each of us is subject to about 10, 000 marketing messages, brands, logos and product offers. 10, 000? Yes, that's a huge number but when you think about it, it's probably close to reality. Let's see for a minute.

You wake up and turn off your SONY alarm clock, go to the bathroom and brush your teeth with your BRAUN electric toothbrush and use some COLGATE toothpaste. While you're brushing, you unconsciously look around you and see your HUGO BOSS cologne, your NIVEA lotion. You turn on your LG TV or your PIONEER radio and hear a commercial for Mossy NISSAN, another commercial for PAPA JOHN'S, and another commercial for

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BANK OF AMERICA. You get a SMS on your APPLE iPhone; it's actually a special offer from MCDONALD'S because you agreed to receive SMS alerts from them. You make some STARBUCK'S coffee in your BODUM French press. It's time to go to work. You grab your keys and walk through the parking lot. You walk by a FORD, a TOYOTA, a BUICK, a KIA, an AUDI (that's mine ;-). You get in, turn on the radio and hear 5 commercials for BUDWEISER, GEICO, BEST BUY, TARGET, and T-MOBILE. You drive off the parking lot and that's when the marketing hammering really starts. You drive by hundreds of different cars (different brands), some of them with stickers for various brand names, you pass hundreds of billboards. OK, let's stop here. I think you get it.

How much do you think you saw of all this? None? Guess again. Reality is you saw most of it, even if you're not aware of it. Scary, huh!? But that's what marketing is all about. It's not because you didn't read the billboard that your brain didn't register the information. When you drive by this billboard, your eyes just lay on it without reading it, but your brain is smarter than you and takes a picture of the billboard, processes it in the background and register all the information without letting you know. Then you go to the store and without thinking about it, you grab some Gatorade. Why Gatorade? Maybe because it's your favourite drink? Or maybe because you heard 21 commercials about it within the last week, saw 15 football teams with the Gatorade logos on their bottles, or maybe you just really like it... No! You don't just really like it. You've been somewhat brainwashed by marketing genius to think you really like it.



These are some of the basics of marketing. I remember my first class of marketing in Business School. The teacher asked: “ what is the goal of marketing?” Most answers were: “ advertising a product”, or “ selling products”. The right answer is that the goal of marketing is to create a need! Do you really an iPhone? I mean, your old BlackBerry Pearl pretty much does it all. Well, marketing creates this need for the iPhone. And they’re so good at it they even make you wait for hours in line to get it...

### **Subliminal Messages in Marketing – Fact or Fake**

The Latin word *sublimis* (meaning uplifted) is the root of the word “ sublime”. It is not at all related to *sub-limen* (meaning below the threshold). Subliminal messages are very much prevalent in the world of advertising. These are messages which are presented below the threshold of human understanding. The chances of they being understood by humans is lesser than 25%. The technique is to give inputs below the threshold of conscious perception. To illustrate, consider an advertisement that flashes in front of you on TV or cinema, but is so short and fast that your conscious mind does not acknowledge it.

Nevertheless, the message does get registered below your level of conscious and thus becomes an input for you to act on. This is easy to practice in cinema halls. Let me explain. It is possible to insert a single frame in twenty four. Suppose the message “ You are Hungry” is flashed a hundred times in short periods of time. This could stimulate your hunger and make you buy something to eat. Critics say that any kind of message can be induced in this manner, which may lead to violent and criminal tendencies in people to rise. But there is no proof to prove if this principle is true.

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Yes, subliminal messages are not a fiction, they are real and existent. But the issue is: How often do we encounter them? A study involving advertising executives has found that, agencies practicing subliminal messages are very few in number. Advertisements, by themselves, are very strong means to influence our brains. Hence, ad-designers will not waste efforts into inserting subliminal messages in their work. Also, if any agency practiced subliminal messages, it will sooner or later be discovered by the media. This will definitely cause a huge dent on the image of the agency. Hence subliminal messaging, although it may exist, is not commercially feasible to be practiced.

### **Subconscious Awareness:**

Each of us has a certain set of principles, ethics, habits, personality which we have cultivated over a period of time. Ever wondered we develop all the above traits? Each second we are bombarded with information in all forms. Our senses observe many of them, and some get registered in our conscious mind. But the rest doesn't get wasted. It is the subconscious mind that stores it and these influence us and play a very significant role in shaping up our habits, personality and skills. So what you are today is a result of what your subconscious mind has stored.

We observe a lot of things in our life, but not all information is useful to us, some of it is bad. The ratio of positive to negative feelings is very high as high as 1: 20. Though we are not conscious of these, our subconscious mind registers all the information since it takes everything to be true. Many of these thoughts also make us underestimate ourselves and limit ourselves to trying only thing we are comfortable with. This shapes us what we are today

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and what capabilities we believe in. We will always be subjected to good and bad experiences and we can control the amount of influence they have on us. When we limit ourselves to our “ comfort” zone, it is indicative of the fact that we are having a high influence of our thoughts which bar us from realizing our full potential. This hampers our creative skills and out of box thinking to a very huge extent. It is very much necessary to overcome these negative influences in our personality if we ever want to taste success.

Human being is different from every other living thing on the earth because we are endowed with a unique feature - that of thinking. But this has the potential to be our best buddy and even the worst of all enemies. What you think largely shapes up your life. We are never bound to adhere to some predetermined set of values, ethics and culture. We are free to try out all new things and then think over to select some and reject some. The most value adding investment is on oneself. This investment should be such that we become more proactive, creative, inspired, perfectionist and confident to list few of the many possible positive traits.

The subconscious mind is not a new concept at all. It's been a subject of huge research for more than a century now. A number of studies and researches have been conducted to understand fully the human behaviour. Hypnosis was a technique which became popular and known in the 1800s. It is from this time that we became our mind that in addition to the conscious intake of input we are also capable of responding to audio, visual stimuli which is below the threshold of conscious brain - or in other words we can respond to subliminal stimuli too. Subliminal - the literal meaning is below (sub) the threshold (limen) i. e. below the limit of our conscious mind. It is a <https://assignbuster.com/the-effectiveness-of-subliminal-mind-messaging/>

very self explanatory term. Computers and technology have been very helpful to discover new traits about these subliminal phenomena. A thorough understanding of bio computer has also helped light some light in the dark and mysterious arena of the subconscious.

It is the advertising world that is believed to be the pioneer in using subliminal concepts for practical purposes. But it came to the fore only in 1958 - through James Vicary's experiment. An experiment was conducted for a period of six weeks during which people watch Kim Novak in the movie Picnic, at Fort Lee, New Jersey were subjected to flash messages displayed on the theatre screen. These messages conveyed them to eat popcorn and drink Coca- Cola. The results were astounding. The sales of Coca cola and popcorn had increased by 18 and 55 per cent! But the degree of influence was not uniform. People, who never ate them, could not be influenced.

Subliminal advertising is banned in the US. There are specific norms framed so as to discourage anyone from using subliminal messages. While we can be vigilant towards things that are visible and audible, we cannot be certainly sure about monitoring things like music, colour and the fragrance. To illustrate for colour, Chinese restaurants use a lot of red while designing the ambience. Red is known to stimulate hunger, hence useful for any restaurant. A department store uses a variety of fragrance, which also is a powerful means to communicate subliminal messages.

The most powerful way to influence your subconscious for self-help and self hypnosis purposes is, definitely, visual subliminal messaging. There are a lot of programs based on subliminal messages in the Web, the most powerful for

today is Subliminal Flash, that displays subliminal messages on your computer screen (duration of every separate message is not more 10 milliseconds, but your subconscious mind is able to notice and accept new objectives that are being sent to it every second).

## **Subliminal Advertising Works**

Subliminal advertising involves the use of messages sent to the subconscious in order to convince people about a particular product or service from the inner depths of their minds. The subconscious mind of a person is responsible for controlling every action and thought instigated by certain conditions. These thoughts and actions include memory extraction and storage as well as breathing and body temperature maintenance among others. The subconscious mind even controls most of the cor