

six-year-olds how to slide into home plate, fascination helps you earn the currency of attention, and you can cash in that attention to accomplish any type of communication goal.

In my book *How the World Sees You*, I identify exactly which traits are most likely to be your most fascinating. I describe how you can more meaningfully connect with the people around you who matter most. Your most fascinating traits help you close deals, earn traffic on your blog, win votes in an election, or accomplish any other endeavor that demands connection.

Ancient cultures realized that fascination holds people captive, making them powerless to resist. They protected their children from this evil force with amulets and ceremonies. Clearly, they knew something that we have since forgotten.

Propaganda: Marketing's Evil Cousin

For a moment, let's see just how evil fascination can become when it falls into the wrong hands.

Imagine a group of people in a locked room.

Those people hear a single message, repeatedly and consistently. Same message, over and over, with few deviations and little conflicting information. When there's no conflicting input, even a false message will be trusted. Pretty soon, that roomful of people will begin to believe the message, no matter how irrational or wrong it is.

However, if these people hear a variety of viewpoints, they're more likely to start questioning the message, forming opinions, and making their own decisions.

If you're a propagandist, you don't want opposing viewpoints—especially if your message must violate and transform an audience's beliefs in order to succeed. If you want to brainwash a group, it is not enough to repeat a message. You must squelch

dissenters. Then, followers are forced to trust what you say, because it's all they know.*

Now that we've reviewed why people submit to propaganda, let's apply those same principles to understand our own behavior. Why do you follow certain people but not others?

Let's turn to the world of cult leaders (and what you can learn from them beyond the fashion recommendations of shaved heads and orange robes).

Beyond the Cult of Personality

Celebrities are almost a socially sanctioned form of cult leaders. From Miley Cyrus to Kim Kardashian to all six degrees of Kevin Bacon, we're fascinated by famous people—sometimes merely because they're famous.

For most fans of celebrities, according to experts, star-watching is a captivating diversion. In the extreme, however, fans become more than captivated. They're actually captive.

A study in the *British Journal of Psychology* found that 20% of us are at risk of replacing emotional connection in our real lives with a full-blown celebrity obsession. The fascination displayed by this 20% goes beyond downloading songs or imitating a hairstyle. Members of this group become disengaged from their real lives, abandoning rational priorities, becoming consumed the way cult members are: blindly following a charismatic alpha leader, mimicking behavior, conforming to a certain way of dressing, talking, and living.

How do cults systematically leverage the darkest powers of fascination? How do they push beyond fascination, to obsession?

* In the extreme, the abuse of fascination leads to the ugliest outcomes. In his autobiography *Mein Kampf*, Adolf Hitler describes the "art of propaganda" as a type of marketing. "What, for example, would we say about a poster that was supposed to advertise a new soap and that described other soaps as 'good'? We would only shake our heads. Exactly the same applies to political advertising."