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The cognitive neuroscience of the highly suggestible person

Verbal suggestions, such as those used in placebo or hypnosis, are capable of effecting pronounced changes in cognition and perception and their neurophysiological substrates. The study of highly suggestible individuals, who comprise ~10% of the population, offers a valuable route to understanding the neurocognitive basis of response to suggestion. Here I will describe our recent research aiming to elucidate the neurocognitive profile of these unique individuals. Accumulating evidence points to a selective metacognitive deficit among highly suggestible individuals that renders them less aware of their intentions. These results are complemented by consistent evidence for elevated suggestibility in selective psychiatric and neurological disorders characterized by aberrant metacognition. Our new magnetoencephalography data suggest that some of these features may be facilitated in part by a specific disruption of connectivity between medial and lateral prefrontal networks in highly suggestible individuals. This research points to suggestibility as a condition characterized by aberrant metacognition that in response to stress may confer a vulnerability to certain disorders.

Bio
Devin is a Senior Lecturer in psychology at Goldsmiths, University of London where he co-directs the Goldsmiths Consciousness Research Unit and directs the timing, awareness, and suggestion lab. His lab uses methods from cognitive neuroscience and experimental psychology to study different features of awareness with a focus on the neural bases of time perception and the use of suggestion to regulate awareness. He completed his PhD at Lund University in Sweden and was previously a postdoctoral research fellow in the Department of Experimental Psychology at the University of Oxford.