



It is not only that people's actions can be influenced by unconscious stimuli; our desires can be too. In one study cited by Custers and Aarts, students were presented with words on a screen related to puzzles — crosswords, jigsaw piece, etc. For some students, the screen also flashed an additional set of words so briefly that they could only be detected subliminally. The words were ones with positive associations, such as beach, friend or home. When the students were given a puzzle to complete, the students exposed unconsciously to positive words worked harder, for longer, and reported greater motivation to do puzzles than the control group.

The same priming technique has also been used to prompt people to drink more fluids after being subliminally exposed to drinking-related words, and to offer constructive feedback to other people after sitting in front of a screen that subliminally flashes the names of their loved ones or occupations associated with caring like nurse. In other words, we are often not even consciously aware of why we want what we want.

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