



FASCINATE

Your 7 Triggers to
Persuasion and Captivation

SALLY HOGSHEAD

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 HarperCollins e-books

TO QUINTON AND AZALEA,
MY FASCINATIONS

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Preface

Witchcraft, Green Peas, and Sigmund Freud

More weight!” cried the old man, begging to be crushed more quickly. “More weight!”

It was the summer of 1692, in Salem village. The old man’s ribs snapped one by one, in sickening succession, each audible to the hundreds of townsfolk encircling his execution. But his pleas were answered instead with the same slow addition of stones upon his chest. For two days, six large men lifted stone and rock onto Giles Corey’s torso. But Corey refused to confess to any charges, asking only for more weight to speed his death. The sheriff stood over him, impatiently waiting for a confession, using his cane to push the old man’s tongue back inside his mouth. At last, Corey was silenced by the final stone dropping upon his breast. His crime? * Giles had been accused of “fascination,” casting a spell that left his victims powerless to resist. The grand jury decreed he had enchanted the townspeople, mesmerizing them so fully that they became immobilized with captivation. Under the spell of fascination, they became hostage to his thoughts, losing the ability to think rationally or protest. * The concept of fascination didn’t begin with Giles Corey’s execution in Salem village. Throughout cultures, across the continents, since the birth of civilization itself, people have studied the ways in which fascination influences behavior. The word “fascination” comes from the ancient Latin, *fascinare*, “to bewitch.”

All around the world, ancient cultures were fascinated with fascination. The Romans believed it was an evil curse, and for protection worshipped one of the earliest Latin divinities: Fascinus, the god of fascination. † In Mesopotamia, Persians believed fascination could cause deadly maladies. In Constantinople, citizens painted passages from the Koran upon their houses to defend their families from the spell of fascination’s evil eye. Fortunately, by 280 B.C., Greece’s first pastoral poet, Theocritus, seemed to have found a safeguard: an old woman’s spit. During the Renaissance, the bookshelves of Europe were filled with weighty tomes on the subject. *De Fascino* defined fascination as “an open covenant with Satan...witchcraft of the eyes, or words...to so compel men that they are no longer free, nor of sane understanding.” A hundred years later, *Tractatus de Fascinatione* warned against lounging in bed too late in the morning wearing nightcaps (yes, nightcaps), or breaking a religious fast on green peas (yes, green peas).

How to prevent and cure? In many cases, the remedy seems almost worse than the disease: the skin of a hyena’s forehead, dust in which a mule had rolled, and a broth stewed from the ashes of a hangman’s rope. Not exactly goods you could pick up on an afternoon Costco run. In the absence of hyena forehead skin, it seems one could also lick the skin of a child’s forehead.

If all that sounds like quackery, let's consult a doctor with whom you might be more familiar: Sigmund Freud. In 1921, Freud labeled the relationship between a therapist and a patient as "fascination," a form of hypnosis. He went on to describe romantic love as a state in which an individual becomes so submissively engrossed in his object of "fascination" that he becomes hypnotized, losing his critical faculties, in "bondage of love."* Freud, apparently, wasn't the only one comparing fascination with hypnosis. The 1911 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* describes fascination as a "hypnotic condition, marked by muscular contraction, but with consciousness and power of remembrance."

Even our modern *Webster's Dictionary* sounds a bit sinister in comparing fascination to witchcraft: "bewitching, or enchanting...the exercise of a powerful or irresistible influence on the affections or passions; unseen, inexplicable influence."

Yet as we'll see, the ability to fascinate isn't witchcraft or hypnotism. And it doesn't come from wearing nightcaps or eating green peas. It is a tool. Rather than something to be feared, it is a discipline to be mastered. Fascination is born of a natural instinct to influence the behavior of others. But the key to mastering fascination is effectively activating the seven triggers:

LUST creates craving for sensory pleasure.

MYSTIQUE lures with unanswered questions.

ALARM threatens with negative consequences.

PRESTIGE earns respect through symbols of achievement.

POWER commands and controls.

VICE tempts with "forbidden fruit," causing us to rebel against norms.

TRUST comforts us with certainty and reliability.

Whether you realize it or not—whether you intend to or not—you're already using the seven triggers. The question is, are you using the *right* triggers, in the *right* way, to get your desired result? By mastering the triggers, your ideas become more memorable, your conversations more persuasive, and your relationships more lasting.

Across the ages, scholars have described the powers of fascination. Century after century, they've told us how to recognize when someone is in a state of fascination. Society after society, they've defined why fascination matters. They've described repeatedly, and at length, the ways in which fascination affects decision making. Yet throughout two thousand years of writings, one question remains unanswered. And this is the most important question of all:

How can *you* become more fascinating?

Let's find out.

Introduction

What Is “Fascination,” Exactly?

How I Became Fascinated with Fascination

Growing up in my family, earning attention wasn’t a recreational pursuit. It was a matter of survival. Like any youngest child, I had to compete with older siblings for attention. By toddlerhood I’d honed numerous strategies, from the strategically executed tantrum to the art of asking, “Why? Why? Why?”

But then, when I turned seven, I was forced to raise my game. That year, my sister was number one in the world in her swimming event (and went on to win three gold medals in the Olympics), and my brother was accepted into Harvard. The height of my achievement up to that point? Gold stars for finger painting.* It was then that I learned my first lesson in fascination: A competitive environment demands a more captivating message. Perhaps it won’t come as a surprise that I went into marketing. Now I create messages for companies whose competitive environments demand captivating messages.

In a distracted and overwhelmed world, everything—including you, your communication, and your relationships—fights tooth and nail to get noticed. Without fascination we can’t sell products off shelves, persuade shareholders to invest, teach students to read, or convince spouses to vacation in Bora Bora next February. Yet with fascination on your side, not only can you vacation in Bora Bora; you can also unlock your own creative potential.

The Boy and the Chandeliers

Watching the boy, you might assume he was either daydreaming or bored. But actually the opposite was true. He was coming alive. Pulse accelerating, pupils dilating, sweat prickling, he stared at the iron chandeliers overhead. Suspended by chains from the ceiling, these chandeliers swung in graceful arcs after their wax candles were lit. The boy watched, hypnotized. He realized something: The chandeliers took an equal number of heartbeats to complete each arc, every single time, whether that arc was big or small. This boy wasn’t merely “interested” in the swaying chandeliers. He wasn’t “paying attention” to them. He was *fascinated* by them, and their movement. They swung back and forth. Back and forth. Like a pendulum.

It was during this moment of fascination in the Pisa Cathedral that a seventeen-year-old Galileo unlocked the most basic rhythm in the universe: *isochronism*, the quantum leap in physics that soon led to his invention of the pendulum clock, which led to modern timekeeping.

Even if you haven’t invented timekeeping, you’ve experienced this spellbinding

focus. It's when you become lost in a moment, losing track of time and the world around, completely focused on a person or message. When you fascinate other people, not only do they focus on you and your message but they're also more likely to believe, care about, and retell your message.

Yet until now, the act of fascinating others has been an unpredictable occurrence, a product of luck or timing or mysticism, rather than an ability to be directed at will. But now, using both art *and* science, we'll clear the mystery. Along the way we'll uncover *what* fascinates people, and *why* it fascinates them. We'll hear from leading experts in psychology, evolutionary biology, neurology, and other-ologies, all shaken and served with a slice of pop culture.* To understand why we become fascinated, and how we fascinate others, we'll delve into results from the first in-depth national marketing survey on fascination. Developed and executed specifically for this book, the Kelton Study includes more than a thousand people around the country in a broad range of ages, industries, and professional levels. The Kelton Study found that people want to be *fascinated*, and they want to be *fascinating*. Two branding implications:

- People would be willing to pay almost a week's salary to be the most fascinating person in any situation. (A big opportunity if your brand can help consumers feel more *fascinating* in their own lives.)
- People want to feel fascinated by a product or experience, and will pay more—often far more—for a brand that fascinates them. (A big opportunity if your brand can help consumers feel more *fascinated*.)

Companies will add more value, and compete more effectively, by activating one or more of the seven triggers. Those who don't will be pushed aside or, worse, forgotten. Messages that fail to fascinate will become irrelevant. It's that simple. This might not be fair. But as Salem villager Giles Corey can attest, fascination doesn't always play nice.

We all have certain behaviors that don't exactly make sense, even to ourselves. We make certain choices, and take certain actions, without understanding exactly *why*. Here's why: In a state of fascination, we don't think and act quite logically. We do things we don't understand, we believe messages we don't agree with, and we buy things we don't even want. At its most extreme, fascination short-circuits the logical evaluation process.

Rather than coolly analyzing a decision, we're gripped by deeply rooted triggers. We might think we're in control of our own choices, but much of the time, we're not. The seven triggers are. Triggers explain why people join suicidal cults, or develop bizarre fetishes, or willingly obey tyrannical dictators. More commonly (but just as irrationally), they buy sports cars they can't afford, procrastinate on major deadlines, or fall in love with the "wrong" person. Yet once you understand the triggers behind them, these decisions begin to make sense. A sneak preview of some examples we'll explore:

When does a billion-dollar anti-drug program actually make kids *more* likely to do drugs?

The U.S. government spends \$1.13 billion annually on an anti-drug program named DARE. Not only does DARE not keep kids off drugs, it makes them *more* likely to use drugs. This massive program increases drug use because it unintentionally fascinates kids, using the vice trigger. It's not just teenagers who respond to vice: This trigger tempts us all to occasionally rebel and experiment.

Why did millions of people trust Hitler?

Hitler activated the trust trigger with horrible effectiveness. How? Trust relies on consistency. Hitler knew this. He exploited a fundamental truth about trust: If you tell a lie big enough, and keep repeating it, and deny any contradicting input, eventually people will come to believe it. No matter how illogical or poorly crafted the argument may be, followers are almost forced to trust the message, because it's all they know. To understand the lessons behind Hitler's tyranny, and to see which brands use the same principles, turn to the trust trigger. And a few pages later, you'll also find out why childhood obesity can be overcome with principles similar to Hitler's.

When is a flower worth more than the house it's planted in front of?

In the late seventeenth century, the world experienced what many economists believe was the first economic bubble. This bubble wasn't in housing, or currency, or credit; it was in tulips. Much like the real estate bubble of 2006, it all started with rumors of outrageous profits. The price of tulips grew higher, and tulips became a symbol of status—a botanical Louis Vuitton bag. The prestige trigger began to obsess both the status-conscious and investors. Prices soared to such extraordinary heights that an entire network of values flipped on its head, and the price of a single bulb began to exceed the average person's salary. Yes, it seems cuckoo in retrospect. But we all make decisions based on the prestige trigger, seeking respect and validation from our peers.

Why, exactly, do humans smile?

When other animals pull their lips back from their teeth, it usually means they're about to attack. Why, then, is smiling a sign of appeasement among humans? Finally, after many years of debate, anthropologists solved the riddle. As you'll see in Part I, it has nothing to do with how it makes your face *look*, and everything to do with how it makes your voice *sound*. It's one of the many ways in which you're already using fascination cues (and always have).

And finally, there's perhaps the most important question of all:

Which of the seven triggers should you be applying to your own work and life?

To answer this question, allow me to direct you to the chapter on mystique. Here, we'll explore the greatest puzzles of the world: from unsolved murders, to secret formulas,

to conspiracy theories. Under the spell of mystique, people willingly do things they'll regret, follow trends they dislike, and even buy products they despise. You'll find out why you're more motivated by curiosity than by answers, and how you can use suspense to your advantage when communicating with others. You'll discover that the most surefire way to kill mystique is...*to give away the answer.*

To answer this last question above, I'm going to trigger a little mystique myself, and won't give away all the answers quite yet. Read on.

In the meantime, I will reveal this: Many of our choices are, in fact, not choices at all. Our best friends and favorite foods, our pets and pet peeves, all are contingent upon the seven triggers. The movies we see, the cereal we buy, we often don't *choose* to be fascinated by these things any more than we *choose* to feel thirsty or fall asleep. It's the same with the opinions we believe, the jokes that make us laugh, and the person with whom we fall in (and out of) love. We're in control far less than we fancy ourselves to be, because our behavior is being pulled by seven unseen strings.

The next time you find yourself engrossed in a game of golf, or craving a specific food, or focusing like mad to meet a deadline at work, ask yourself: What's actually going on here? Underneath the surface, which of the seven triggers is causing this fascination? Once you understand how fascination works, you might realize that your behavior is being driven by something far different from what you think.

You don't control fascination. Fascination controls you.

PART I

Fascinate or Fail

Will You Fascinate? Or Will You Fail?

The Big O

Speaking of Fascination, Let's Start with Sex, Shall We?

The darkened cocktail lounge of the St. Paul airport Marriott is a social petri dish, commingling business travelers from otherwise unrelated companies, cities, and professions. The lounge's ferns-and-brass ambiance offers these road warriors a comforting mixture of familiarity and anonymity.

In between serving Sam Adams and Kendall-Jackson chardonnay, bartenders witness the nightly routine of strangers engaged in flirtation, a timeworn ritual that often progresses from suggestive glances to the elevator banks in two hours or less. Had these bartenders studied Irenäus Eibl-Eibesfeldt's research in evolutionary anthropology, they'd realize that they're front and center at a nightly performance of the flirtation tango—a series of dance steps choreographed over the millennia by the Martha Graham of mating dances, Mother Nature herself.

Whether a woman regularly quotes Carrie Bradshaw from *Sex and the City* or belongs to a society with no written language, she'll flirt using almost exactly the same nonverbal signals as other women across continents, cultures, and geographies. Eibl-Eibesfeldt discovered that women from around the globe—from craggy, remote islands to metropolitan epicenters—use the same repertoire of gestures when determining whether a potential mate is available and interested. Flirting, like all fascinations, is innate.

The Canoodling Tango

In her aptly named book, *Sex*, Joann Ellison Rodgers describes Eibl-Eibesfeldt's discovery on just how all women flirt. A female begins fascinating a male by smiling at him, raising her brows to make her eyes appear wider and more childlike, quickly lowering her lids while tucking her chin slightly down, in an effort to bring him closer. After averting her gaze to the side, she will, within moments and almost without exception, put her hands on or near her mouth and giggle, lick her lips, or thrust out her chest while gazing at the object of her intended affection. And it's consistent, regardless of language, socioeconomic status, or religious upbringing. For men, says Rodgers, the fascination ritual is less submissive but no less standardized. He'll puff out his chest, jut his chin, arch his back, gesture with his hands and arms, and swagger in dominant motions to draw attention to his power (not unlike the way a male pigeon puffs his chest, or a male gorilla struts). Like a woman's flirtation, he's advertising critical cues about his reproductive fitness.

Fascination. Flirtation. Fornication.

Just as we're born to be fascinated by specific signals from potential mates, we're also born knowing how to fascinate them as well. Flirtation is the most elemental of all fascinations, one of a handful of instinctive cues upon which all life depends. No flirtation, no mating. No mating, no offspring. No offspring, no family, no passing of the genes, no species.

Fascination isn't the same as sex, of course. However, sex does provide a conveniently accurate metaphor. And unlike, say, South American bird watching, sex is a universal phenomenon. So for purposes of making our point academically, sex it shall be.

Fascination Is a Force of Attraction

This force of attraction heightens intellectual, emotional, and physical focus. Couples in the St. Paul Marriott fall into this captivated grip, and you experience it, too. When you impulsively decide to see a certain movie, when you crave your favorite chocolate almond ice cream, or when you hit repeat on your iPod to hear that song one more time, you're experiencing a similar—if less intense—attraction.

Attraction doesn't have to make sense. In most cases, attraction is highly irrational. We generally don't decide to be fascinated any more than we decide to be attracted to a certain person, because root causes for our fascinations are hardwired into us long before we have any say in the matter.

Fascination takes many forms, but all tap into instinctive triggers, such as the need to hunt, to control, to feel secure, to nurture and be nurtured. Some fascinations last only a heartbeat, while others last beyond a seventy-fifth wedding anniversary. No matter how long it lasts, or what behavior it motivates, or which trigger inspires it, every fascination binds with a singularly intense connection. We are, if only for a moment, utterly spellbound. Herein lies the power of fascination: It strips away our usual rational barriers, exposing our minds, leaving us vulnerable to influence, naked to persuasion.

Speaking of naked, let's check back in with our couples flirting in the St. Paul airport Marriott lounge.

At the bar, a paralegal is progressing nicely through her flirtation with the service engineer from Sacramento. They're performing their steps in the mating dance with predictable precision. Yes, it's all a bit crazy. But if the notion that you're not in control of your flirtation seems crazy, take heart: You're not as crazy as you will become, once infatuated.

[The Mental Disorder Known as Infatuation](#)

As things progress during flirtation, our neurochemistry rewards us with a psychotic journey known as "infatuation." Fascination and infatuation both originate in the *limbic* area of the brain, the part that houses rage, ecstasy, sadness, sexual arousal, and fight-or-flight.

In the book *Love Sick: Love as a Mental Illness*, Frank Tallis writes that if we take

the symptoms of falling in love and “check them against accepted diagnostic criteria for mental illness, we find that most ‘lovers’ qualify for diagnoses of obsessional illness, depression or manic depression.” Other symptoms include insomnia, hyperactivity, and loss of appetite. Ah, ain’t love grand? Northwestern University psychologist Eli Finkel describes how falling in love can “make otherwise normal people do very wild things. They’ll stalk, hack into e-mail, eavesdrop and do other things they’d never do in a rational frame of mind.” Helen Fisher, an evolutionary anthropologist, explains that the elevated dopamine levels experienced during the rush of falling in love can drive us to take risks that might otherwise seem unthinkable.* So love really does conquer all, and not always in a good way.

But wait. Hold on. Why would our brains throw us into a temporary insanity? What’s the evolutionary purpose for this whacked-out loss of control? To understand why fascination grasps us so irresistibly, keep in mind the illogic of flirtation, and the lunacy of love.

Fascination, as we’ve seen, is a visceral and primal decision-making process, one that’s largely involuntary. Fisher says that our brains are literally “built to fall in love” because it’s in our evolutionary best interest *not* to think clearly during the two-year time period it takes to meet, court, and produce a child, or else we might come to our senses and avoid the inconvenience of child rearing altogether. Tallis agrees, proposing that evolution has hardwired us for psychopathological romantic obsessions that last “just long enough to ensure the survival of genes from one generation to the next.”

First Comes Love, Then Comes Marriage, Then Comes the Survival of the Species in a Baby Carriage

Most elements of fascination work at the subconscious level. Unlike the act of paying attention, which is rational, our fascinations have more in common with less logical behaviors of passion. We don’t even realize it’s happening, any more than we realize that we’re flirting for reasons that have less to do with hearts and flowers and more to do with our biological urge to procreate. Whether you realize it or not, you experience fascination’s irrational grip.

Now that we’ve covered flirtation and falling in love, it’s time to go a step further, and find out why your body is equipped to manufacture the quintessential fascination.

Orgasm: The Ultimate Fascination

If flirtation and sex are metaphors for fascination, then the experience of orgasm itself is fascination in the extreme. Ground-breaking human sex researcher Alfred Kinsey described the fascination of sexual climax: “Some, and perhaps most persons may become momentarily unconscious at the moment of orgasm...only vaguely aware of reality.” Freud noted that orgasm brings an almost complete disappearance of thought, a hypnoid state with a temporary loss of self-awareness.* This focused state plays itself out in everyday life. Think of when you’re “in the zone.” Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi describes what he calls a “flow state,” and its loss of self-consciousness. “Flow is the mental state of operation in which the person is fully immersed in what he or she is doing, characterized by a feeling of energized focus.”