

The Power of Charisma-- It can actually inhibit higher brain function in "believers" -- Science of the Spirit -- Sott.net

This article is an outgrowth of my continuing interest in the ties between psychopathy, authoritarianism, domination, hierarchy, patriarchy and top-down power

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Speaker at a Pentecostal revival - Tallahassee.

If a fundamentalist religious person even thinks another person is a charismatic leader or healer, he or she inhibits his pre-frontal cortex-- the executive, higher level thinking part of the brain.

That's what I take from a study titled [The power of charisma-- perceived charisma inhibits the frontal executive network of believers in intercessory prayer.](#)



A religious person, anticipating a person who has a reputation as a charismatic-- **a trait usually held by smarter, more successful psychopaths, psychopaths and narcissists-- literally** shuts down his or her highest brain functions in the charismatic's presence. (Certainly not all charismatic people are charismatic, but it is a common trait of high functioning psychopaths and narcissists.)

That doesn't happen in the brains of non-believers.

Let's talk about the etymology and meanings of Charisma and Charismatics. The word charisma is derived from the Greek word charismata, which means "a gift of grace.

[Wikipedia](#) offers two definitions for charisma:

(1) compelling attractiveness or charm that can inspire devotion in others, (2) a divinely conferred power or talent.

And informs us that

"Ancient Greeks applied personality charisma to their gods; for example, attributing charm, beauty, nature, human creativity or fertility to goddesses they called Charites".

Further, Wikipedia gives this background about "divinely conferred charisma":

"The Hebrew Bible and the Christian Bible record the development of divinely conferred charisma. In the Hebrew text the idea of charismatic leadership is generally signaled by the use of the noun hen (favor) or the verb hanan (to show favor). The Greek term for charisma (grace or favor), and its root charis (grace) replaced the Hebrew terms in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible (the 3rd century BC Septuagint). Throughout, "the paradigmatic image of the charismatic hero is the figure who has received God's favor" In other words, divinely conferred charisma applied to highly

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Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson.

In 2011 it was estimated there were an estimated 300 million plus charismatic Christians in the world-- 120 million of them being Catholic. There are also Orthodox Jews who attribute charismatic characteristics to leaders, such as Rebbe Menachem Schneerson, who has been characterized as the messiah.

The charismatic power of People's Temple and Jonestown leader Jim Jones gives you an idea of how powerful a role a charismatic leader can play in a person's life... and death.

Certainly there's a big difference between someone who has a non-religious charisma, compared to someone who is attributed with religious charismatic character. Still, like most characteristics attributed to psychopaths and narcissists, there is a continuum.

It seems that this brain response pattern could be a key element in understanding domination, subordination, respect for authority and victims of psychopaths and narcissists continued toleration of abuse.

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Jim Jones, 1977

I speculate that this kind of inhibition of higher brain functioning in the face of certain kinds of charismatic people is widespread, not just among the religious. Since some people exposed to the same people as stimuli do not experience brain inhibition, that suggests that it the inhibition is not involuntary and that it can be repressed-- repression of inhibition.

People can learn to continue to use the full functioning of their brain in the presence of intimidating, dominating, charismatically influential individuals, though it may be more of a challenge for individuals raised and marinated in a Pentecostal or Orthodox Jewish milieu where submission to charismatic dominants is a part of the culture.

I learned of this study because, after over 40 articles, interviews, transcripts etc., I realized that I had really ignored charisma as one of the common factors among psychopaths, sociopaths and narcissists. Charisma can be a positive. Yet it is also a valuable weapon for the malignant or traumatizing psychopath or narcissist. it was astonishing for me, discovering that charisma could have an inhibiting effect upon brain function. This is the stuff science fiction movies about mind controlling aliens are made of.

We don't know, but I would hazard a guess that the brain inhibition in response to charismatic individuals feels good-- probably calming-- it may even evoke endorphin and or oxytocin responses as the dimmed brain person experienced feelings of safety and nurturing.

In the animal world there are predator-prey relationships where the prey becomes hypnotized by the predator. This does not seem very different from that phenomenon. It may not be a hypnotic state, but it is one in which the brain is less critical, analytic and filtering.

Most people in fundamentalist religious groups want to be there. They want to feel subordinate, to let go of their critical thinking, believing to be replacing it with faith. Most authoritarian personalities are not dominators. They are people who seek out domination by authority figures. I would speculate that this not only applies to



charismatic Christians, but also charismatic authoritarian leaders, like Hitler, Mussolini, Mao, etc. They evoke brain inhibition in people who are primed to be subordinate.

I would imagine that victims, usually women, in relationships with predatory sociopaths, etc. develop similar thoughts and feelings, wanting to be in a relationship with someone they can trust, be guided by, receive healing and love.

Perhaps even love itself or the idea of falling in love involves dimming the most critical, questioning, analytical parts of our brains as we engage with a person we hope will change our lives and become a part of our hearts. Perhaps a bit of that is good, in response to compassionate opportunities. Maybe that's why this higher brain function inhibition developed-- as a good part of being in a loving relationship.

Or perhaps this response evolved because people in tribes who faced up to dominating alpha leaders were killed and those who were cowed survived. Still, keep in mind, that this response only appears for people who see, in their minds, people as charismatic. I would hope that throughout history and pre-history, there have been people who have seen through dominating bullies and fought for justice and fairness.

Another theoretical guess-- people who are raised in authoritarian families, with strong patriarchal, or even dominating, narcissistic parenting, will be more susceptible to the pattern of inhibition of the brain's executive functions.

Still, knowing that hundreds of millions of people prime their brains to accept authoritarian charismatic leaders tells us a bit about the challenge activists face in seeking to waken people to challenge unjust authoritarian systems and leaders, whether psychopathic, narcissistic or simply criminal or power hungry.